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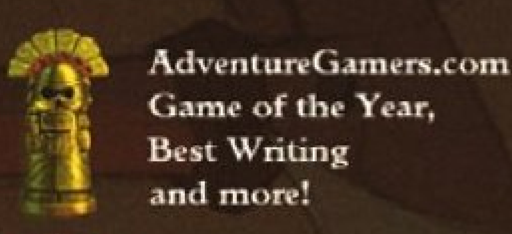
4 VIDEO GAMES

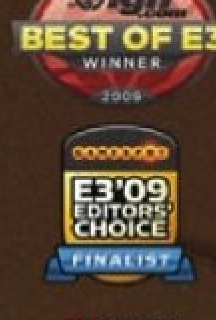
- **ROAD RASH** Feel the burn with EA's hit bike franchise
- **DEVIL MAY CRY 3** Why Dante's third outing is his best
- **EXOLON** Raff Cecco looks back at his 8-bit hit
- **DARK FORCES** How LucasArts reignited Star Wars

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THE RETROBATES WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FIREBIRD GAME?



DARRAN JONES
I'm going to have to say *Flying Shark* on the Amstrad. It's not a particularly impressive conversion, but my cousin and myself ploughed a ridiculous number of hours into it.
Expertise:
Steering the helm of an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Kirby's Epic Yarn
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT
Still wonderfully original, arrestingly atmospheric and stunning to look at today, Geoff Crammond's timeless classic *The Sentinel* gets my vote.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Assassin's Creed Brotherhood
Favourite game of all time:
Assassin's Creed Brotherhood



JASON KELK
Io on the C64, one of the slickest and most attractive 8-bit home computer shoot-'em-ups ever released.
Expertise:
Reassembling hardware and finding leftover screws.
Currently playing:
It doesn't have a name yet!
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL
The excellence of the wonderful *Samurai Warrior* does it for me – a great adventure and comic conversion. Wonderful *Qix* update *Zolyx* gets a worthy runner-up spot.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
World Of Goo on iPad
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

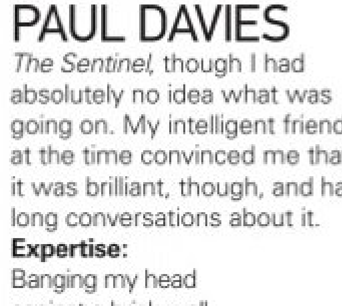


RICHARD BURTON
It's graphically average and as a one-player game is completely underwhelming. Just add player two and suddenly *Harvey Headbanger* becomes retro gaming at its simplistic best.
Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Homefront
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



PAUL DRURY
The ambitious majesty of *Elite* is the sensible choice but I spent more time on Stephen Ruddy's brilliant conversion of *Bubble Bobble*.
Expertise:
DIP switch settings
Currently playing:
Ghost Trick
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space





PAUL DAVIES
The Sentinel, though I had absolutely no idea what was going on. My intelligent friend at the time convinced me that it was brilliant, though, and has long conversations about it.
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Killzone 3
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts





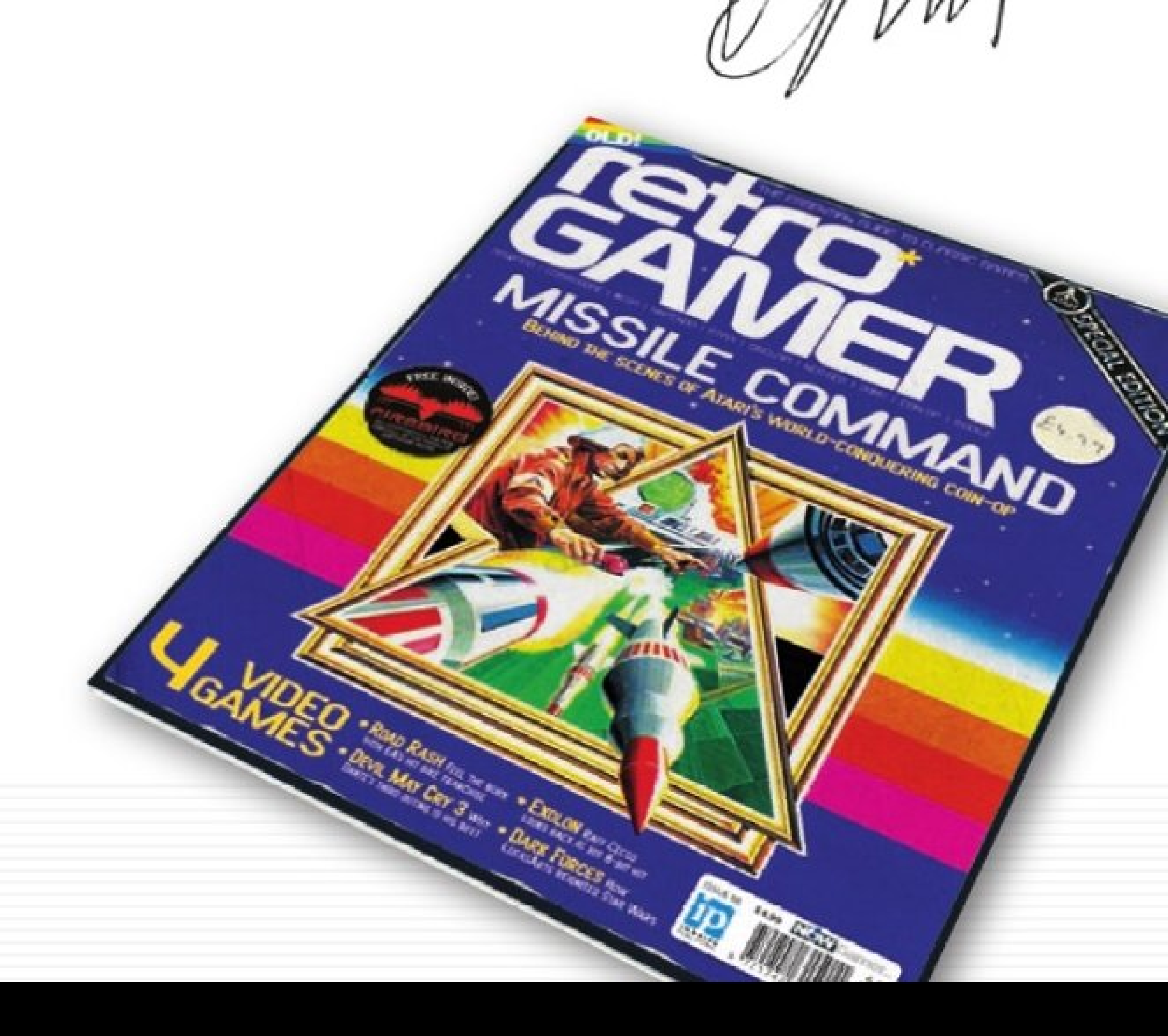
This month's cover represents a quest that has taken me eight long years to complete. To me, Dave Theurer is a genius. He was essential to the success of Atari and was the brains behind three of my favourite Atari games: *Tempest, I, Robot* and *Missile Command.*

I've fond memories of playing *Missile Command* upon its release, often standing on a strategically placed chair so I could fully master its trackball – I was seven at the time and rather lacking in height. Mesmerised by its simple yet demanding gameplay – 31 years later and I'm still no closer to mastering it – it recalls a time in my life when videogames were still incredibly fresh and exciting, allowing me to experience things that I never thought were possible.

So to finally get Dave Theurer to agree to an interview was a massive thrill for me and also proves that no matter what issue we're on, there are always plenty of stories from the old days left to tell.

A Coin-op Capers and an actual making of may seem rather excessive, but the way we see it, if you're going to cover an iconic game, you might as well make it as comprehensive as possible. Hopefully you'll enjoy reading about the making of *Missile Command* as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Enjoy the magazine,





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>> **Load 88** Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

RETRO REVIVALS



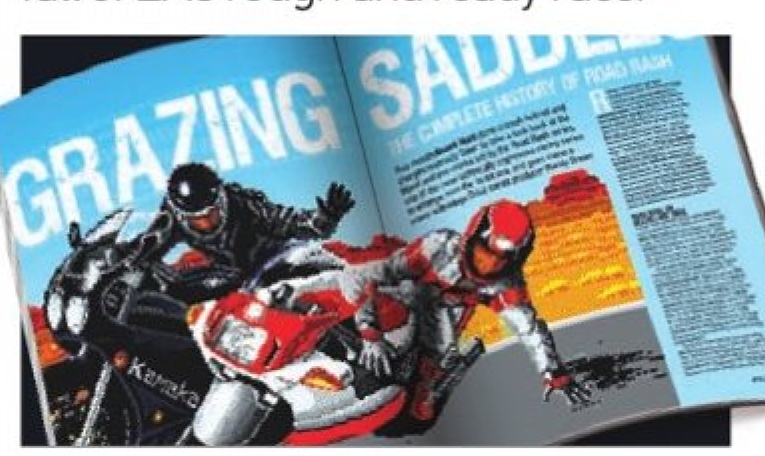
In the hot seat this month…





> "One of the most cathartic games ever made" Samuel Roberts















ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED







>> It's been a month of mixed emotions for us. While we're pleased to see the rather good Videogame Nation reappear, it's tempered by the loss of Bizzare Creations, one of the UK's most innovative studios...



» Each section of the exhibition is themed, meaning that you should find something that will spark your interest as you look around.

★ CONTENTS



HOWAY THE GAMES

BRITISH GAMING EXHIBITION VIDEOGAME NATION GOES ON TOUR WITH A SEVEN-MONTH STOP IN THE NORTH EAST

The landscape of the north-east of England has changed dramatically over the years. The collieries which so dominated many parts of the region have gone, and the pit heaps have been reclaimed and naturalised into the landscape. Coal mining has greatly influenced and shaped the modern character of this area, but there is another industry that has also proved to be so essential to the region's economy: videogaming.

For it is in the north-east that a cluster of important developers have formed a crucial hub for gaming over the years. During the 1980s, the seeds of a vibrant new, creative industry in Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesbrough were sewn, an industry that has, in some ways, taken over from where mining, shipping and manufacturing left off. So it is quite fitting to see that Videogame Nation's new, temporary home is nestled within a former colliery.

It is a very different space to that of the exhibition's debut in Manchester in 2009. Back then it was located in one of the city's most recent and modern structures, a gleaming glass icon that marked the area's renaissance following the devastating IRA bomb of 1996. This time around it is situated within a former workshop, which dates back to 1894 and was used to make and repair ironwork and woodwork for the colliery.

The exhibition has a very industrial feel, with pulleys and a blacksmith's hearth, and yet seeing dozens of games within this space somehow feels right. It's a juxtaposition of the old and the new, with some of those internal features actually forming part of the exhibition itself. The hearth, for example, takes pride of place in a living room area in which gamers can kick back and play the likes of *Tomb Raider* and *WipEout*.

Rather than just take the existing Videogame Nation structure from 2009 and transport it further north, the exhibition has been bespokely designed and it has a strong north-east flavour, showcasing games past and present from the area. The exhibition is as much about the people behind the games as the titles themselves, and there are biographies of various north-eastern developers including Brian Jobling, the founder of Zeppelin Games in 1987, and Darren and Jason Falcus, who started Optimus Software in 1988 on Teesside and went on to head up various other studios in the area.

It delves in the history of Ubisoft Reflections, formerly known as Reflections Interactive, and players can get to grips with some of the games, among them *Shadow Of The Beast* and *Destruction Derby*. There are original design documents for the *Driver* games and some stunning artwork from other north-east-produced games.

And yet the exhibition is not solely centred on the area, as you will have gathered by the inclusion of *Tomb Raider* and *WipEout*. By taking gamers on a journey through the past four decades of gaming, it seeks to contextualise the contribution of the area by showcasing other classic British games. It shows how gaming has evolved into one of the most important industries in Britain, and it allows gamers who stopped playing





» There's a large number of different consoles and home computers on offer. The only difficulty now is deciding what to actually play.



"The aim is to educate people and get the message across"

GO DEEPER

» Videogame Nation pays tribute to a host of top gaming names including the Falcus brothers, Matthew Smith, Jeff Minter, Jon Hare, Peter Molyneux, and Richard and David Darling.

» There is a wall with huge screenshots of *Fantasy World Dizzy* – complete with hand drawn maps by The Oliver Twins.

» Revolution Software boss Charles Cecil has lent some brilliant original artwork by original *Broken Sword* artist Eoghan Cahill.

» Original documents from *Sensible Soccer* are on view in the sports area. You can play a great selection of north-east driving games, one of the area's strong points.



in the 1980s to see just how far titles have come, as well as letting those who started to play relatively recently to see how it all started.

The games are not just thrown into the space but arranged in various sections, from a recreated bedroom to streets, an arcade, an astroturfed sporting arena complete with stadium seating, a living room and an office area. Gamers can see the progression of handhelds and see how they have slimmed down over the years, and they can listen to the likes of Sir Clive Sinclair, Matthew Smith, Toby Gard and Charles Cecil discussing how they produced their games.

And, of course, there are plenty of classic titles. *Burnin' Rubber* on the GX4000, *Micro Machines* on the NES, coin-ops such as *Ghosts N' Goblins*, and classic disc-based games like *Sensible Soccer*, *Kick Off*, *Populous*, *Lemmings*, *Theme Park* and *Broken Sword*. There are hand-drawn *Dizzy* maps and loads of design documents, and even a Yoda built from Lego.

Behind all of this is **Retro Gamer** writer David Crookes. Having curated the first exhibition, he is looking to take it across the UK over the coming years. "I can't even begin to explain just how much fun putting this exhibition together has been," he says. "Seeing all of these classic machines placed into context and then showing how well they compare with the modern games of today is just amazing. The aim is to educate people and get the message across that gaming is ultimately about people – those who make them and those who play them. And it's showing just how viable a career in gaming can be. But it's also about having fun and demystifying games. Seeing young children bringing their grandparents down and introducing them to gaming is an utter joy."

The show runs until 5 September at Woodhorn Museum and Northumberland Archives, and costs £3.95 (adults) and £2.95 (children). A family ticket for two adults and two children is also available for £12.50. *

Making Britain great

Key British developers give their thoughts on gaming



Jason Falcus
STALWART VIDEOGAME DEVELOPER

■ Britain has produced some of the all time classics in videogaming history. In the States, the console market boomed, but these were closed systems, which the general public couldn't program, and which I think gave the programmers in Britain a big advantage."



Gareth Edmondson
STUDIO MANAGER, UBISOFT REFLECTIONS

■ Videogame Nation is a great idea. The north-east in an important part of the UK gaming industry. We were more than happy to lend assets including documents relating to *Driver*, and the original computer from 1982 that we produced our first game on."

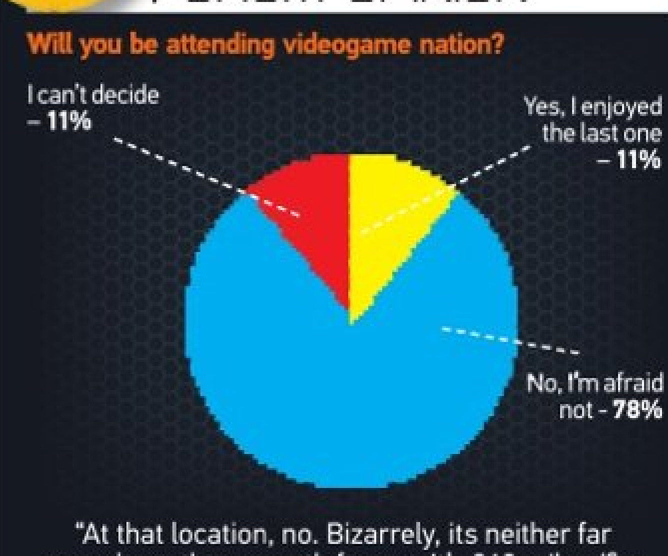


Charles Cecil
HEAD OF REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

■ British developers have been extraordinary innovators – we have created new genres, and innovated within those that already existed. The requirement to creatively combine the technical with the artistic is something that, as a nation, we have always been good at."

FORUM OPINION

Will you be attending videogame nation?



"At that location, no. Bizarrely, its neither far enough north nor south for me. It's 240 miles (five hours) by road from home, so hard to justify a day out. Conversely, work is taking me south of the border these days, but across in Blackpool, and it's too far for me to easily make from there too."
– Antiriad2097

"I've already been as I only live about 15-20 mins away from it. I wrote a bit about it, and I'm actually going to contact them to see if they would like any stuff on a temporary loan. I'd also be quite happy to see if I can get some photos, and would happily write something up if needed." **– dste**

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Opposable Thumbs

I've had a weird week of being confronted with my history. My agent recently sent me two huge boxes full of VHS tapes containing pretty much everything I have ever done. They came with a note saying, 'We pulled these out of the bin.' THE BIN!? My whole life's shizzle on a nearly-dead format being thrown into a BIN?

Anyway, this box contained stuff I remembered and loved – *Rise*, *The 11 O'clock Show* – and stuff I have no recollection of doing – *Vent*, *Critical Mass*… anyone? There was also a load of guff in there as well (Yes, ha ha to the wags saying *Rise* and *The 11 O'clock Show*. Up yours!).

The main offender in the Iain Lee Hall of Shame is *Thumb Bandits*, a late-night gaming show I presented with the wonderful Aleks Krotoski, who is now an actual doctor of computerings and owns 37 per cent of the internet (true facts).

Thumb Bandits should have been awesome. When it was sold to me, it sounded like a dream job. Basically, Aleks and I were going to present a serious gaming show that we would write and have a lot of input in. Matthew Smith was going to be a regular, we could say what we wanted in reviews without fear of reprisal and there would be no lame sketches with sped-up footage.

Sadly, none of the above happened.

I should have been suspicious from day one. First, the title is utter guff, a childish attempt at humour that was always going to make us look bad. Also, this was going to be replacing *Bits*. *Bits* was fantastic! Here's an idea, TV dudes: take a show with three hot girls, get rid of two of the hot girls and replace them with a skinny, lanky, pale idiot who makes Skeletor look chubby. Yeah, the kids will LOVE that!

The next muff-up was the set. We were filming in Glasgow and had already shot five episodes when a suit from London came up to see what we were doing. They hated the set and ordered us to rebuild it and film the episodes again. That totally spaffed off the budget, meaning the remaining 87 shows would have to be done on a shoestring.

Another stumbling block was an honest review I did of a terrible game that was suffering a bit from a case of The Emperors New Clothes. I slagged it off and suddenly all the games companies were pulling out of supporting the show. The pressure was on to say nice things about shit games. Aleks and I fought it, but I think we were perhaps a bit generous to a terrible WWF game to show willing.

Saying all this, I do still get very nice emails asking me about *TB* and saying how much they enjoyed it, so maybe there was some merit in there. I may put a few episodes up online so you can have a look and let me know: *Thumb Bandits* – great or gash?

All the games companies were pulling out of the show. The pressure was on to say nice things about shit

THE END OF AN AFFAIR

BIZARRE CREATIONS FINALLY CLOSES ITS DOORS



In another death knell for the British games industry, it was recently announced that Bizarre Creations – the developer behind such hit franchises as *Geometry Wars* and *Project Gotham Racing* – has finally closed its doors.

Bizarre Creations began its life as Raising Hell Software. Formed by Martyn Chudley in 1988, early titles such as *The Killing Game Show* and *Wiz 'N Liz* immediately singled the company out for being a little different to the norm, while later titles such as *Metropolis Street Racer* and the excellent and highly underrated *The Club* continued to show that the developer wasn't afraid to break away from typical gaming conventions.

Raising Hell Software changed its name to Bizarre Creations in 1994, and secured the rights to develop *Formula 1* for the PlayStation (a title many gamers still claim to be one of the best console replications of the sport). A sequel followed, but the team moved over to the Dreamcast and delivered the wonderful *Metropolis Street Racer*, which many see as the digital blueprint for Bizarre's later *Project Gotham Racing* series for Xbox.

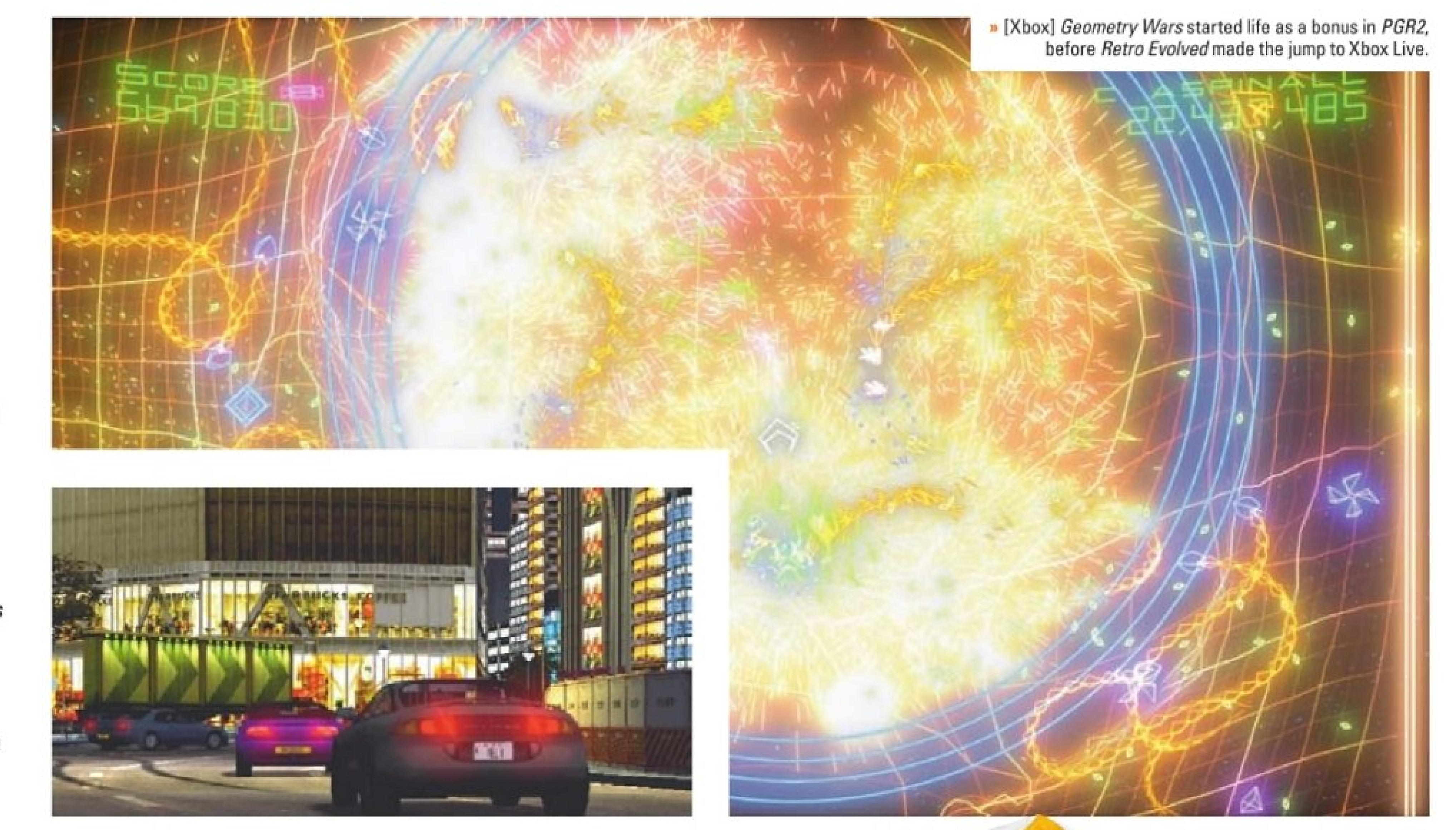
Quirkier titles such as *Fur Fighters*, *The Club* and *Boom Boom Rocket* appeared over the following years, but it became primarily best known for the *Project Gotham Racing* series and *Geometry Wars*, the twin stick shooter to come closest to competing with the majesty of Eugene Jarvis' *Robotron: 2084*.

After building up a strong following, first with Sega and then Microsoft, Bizarre announced in 2007 that Activision had acquired it for a cool $67.4 million. Activision was no doubt hoping that Bizarre's success in the driving genre (which had generated over 7 million sales for the *Project Gotham Racing* franchise) would follow. The racing game that eventually appeared, *Blur*, was extremely good and built up a huge following online, but it seemed to polarise critics, with some not liking the way *Mario Kart*-styled weapons were bolted onto a realistic racer. Things were further complicated by the arrival of Disney's *Split/Second: Velocity* (a game which, while very different in execution, looked quite similar on the surface) and lacklustre sales. Despite this, Bizarre remained confident in the franchise, with Nick Davies telling Gamerzines in July 2010 that *Blur* was "the start of a big franchise at Bizzare."

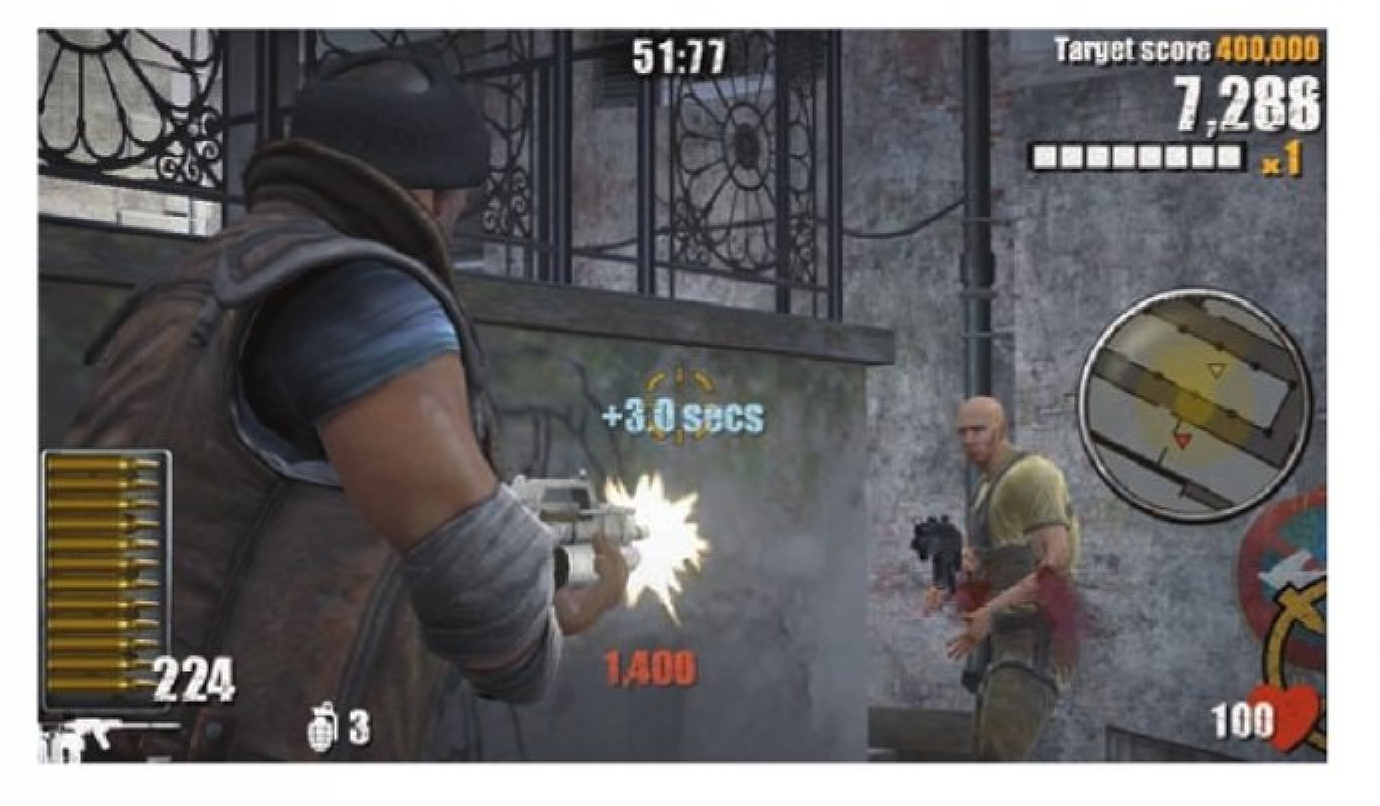
It wasn't to be, however, and rumours of the developer's demise first began circulating in November 2010, with Develop stating that Activision had put the studio on three month's notice. It came at a particularly bad time, because Bizarre's latest game *007: Blood Stone* had only been released a few weeks earlier, and in the shadow of Activision's very own *Call Of Duty: Black Ops*, no less. Add in the fact that *Blur*, despite building up a cult following, hadn't sold close to the number of units Activision was hoping and the writing was on the wall for the talented developer.

After spending three months looking for a publisher, Activision COO Coddy Johnson told Develop Online: "I want to be clear; our first choice was to try and keep this group together and find a buyer for the studio. We explored a lot of leads – pretty much anyone you can imagine in the industry. Unfortunately, so far we've not been able to find any interested parties. So we've made, as a last resort, a recommendation to the team for closure."

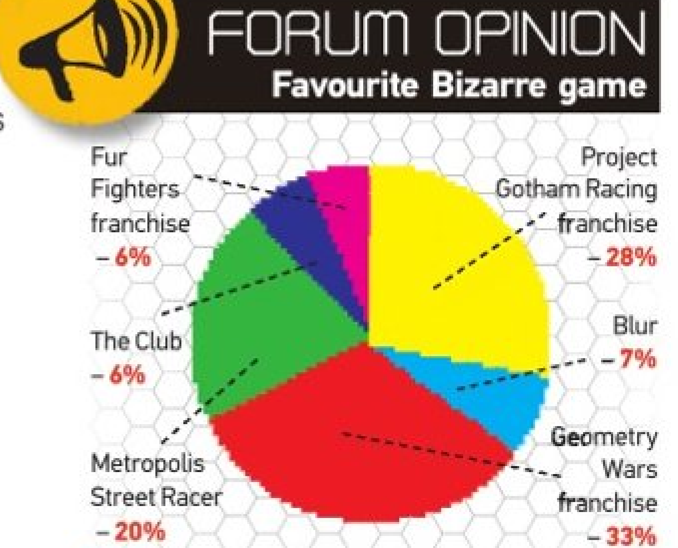
Bizarre Creations closed its doors on 18 February. It released a video of some of its games, available to view at www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAD4r2dMmKE. The company may well live on in some form, however, as several ex-members of staff have unveiled a new studio, Lucid Games. No games have been announced yet, but we're betting it will make at least one racing title. Goodbye, Bizarre Creations. You will be missed. *



» [Xbox] *Geometry Wars* started life as a bonus in *PGR2*, before *Retro Evolved* made the jump to Xbox Live.



FORUM OPINION
Favourite Bizarre game



* WHAT WE THINK



Darran



As well as *MSR* and *Geometry Wars*, Bizarre was also behind the underrated *The Club*. The idea that I may never see sequels to any of these games makes me rather sad.

Stuart



I was a big fan of *PGR*, while *Geometry Wars* was wonderful. Bizarre has made some truly inventive games. It will be a real shame to live in a world without it.

David



As a proud North Westerner, it was really sad to see a local developer close its doors, especially one with such a proud pedigree of truly enjoyable games.

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *CVG*. I led the *CVG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of CVG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

In crowd

I've got shocking taste in music, and I wonder if this also applies to my games. It's a sobering thought, but everyone has a right to their era.

Playing *Bulletstorm* this month I felt like the mac daddy. That's right, I was feeling jam hot. Just like when I played a proper *Tempest* arcade machine at Butlins Minehead in 1984, using a rotating fire button instead of Z, X and space bar. And just so you know, I'd managed to grow a long fringe that made me look just like Bruce Dickinson. "Who's that cool kid playing that awesome videogame?" said the girl in the ra-ra skirt.

Mostly I think videogames are immune to the cringe factor in hindsight, being not widely considered trendy in the first place. However, since marketing folk began having more of a say than the guys making them, gaming eras are starting to get 'sucky'. Whereas the development of the Eighties arcade scene, home computer hobbyists and the early Nineties console crowd seemed organic, recent trends are as blatant as boy bands.

Basically games get crap when people who don't really care or understand think they've got the measure of them. Genuine gaming eras to be proud of would be *Space Invaders*, *Galaxian* and *Pac-Man*; *Shinobi*, *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, *Splatterhouse* and maybe *ESWAT*; *Area 88*, *1942* and *Raiden*… the Capcom CPS fighters versus Neo-Geo, Sega head-to-head with Namco for pole position. When rival creators bring titles to market out of respect and something to prove, that is good. To me that's an era, and you should value your taste even if you look back and think, 'Oh, God'.

The very worst enforced gaming era that springs to mind was the bling thing in the wake of *Grand Theft Auto III* at the start of the decade. That and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* getting muddled up with *Jackass*. Even Sonic had to make way for his gangsta counterpart in *Shadow The Hedgehog*. *Need For Speed* went chavvy. It was absolute misery driving the likes of you and me back in time to remember the good stuff. Hence **Retro Gamer**. Well hallelujah.

I feel deprived of a proper gaming era back there, when other games that should have been celebrated more in the early Noughties were Namco's ahead-of-its-time *Breakdown* and *Katamari Damacy*. Our work experience kids were massively looking forward to the next *Dynasty Warriors* – to me this was true gamers desperate for anything other than a false attitude.

But this could be the result of my having really terrible taste. Your shelves could be heaving with stuff like *Saints Row*, *NBA Ballers* and *The Simpsons: Hit & Run*. And, begrudgingly, if I were to look at a room full of all that I would have to shake your hand and say: "Well, this was your era." I would also add "…and you're welcome to it", but then I'm sounding like my dad. He wouldn't give Adam And The Ants the time of day.



Whereas the Eighties scene seemed organic, recent trends are as blatant as boy bands



ROOM AND DOOM

MICROSOFT'S GAME ROOM PROJECT GETS PUT ON HOLD

After many weeks of inactivity, it would appear that Game Room on Xbox Live is on indefinite hold. First launched in March 2010, we were excited because it offered us the chance to replay some of the greatest arcade games of all time. Well, that was the theory…

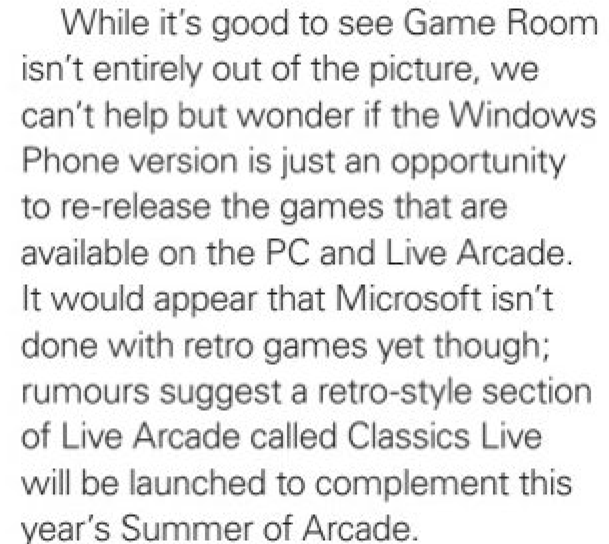
While we were perfectly happy with the launch (after some initial teething problems), quite a few gamers were unhappy with both the quality of the emulation and the large number of Intellivision and Atari 2600 titles that the service constantly featured.

Things weren't looking good for the future of Game Room when the promised version of *Sunset Riders* failed to arrive and no new games appeared in January. A new version of Game Room was announced for Windows Phone at the beginning of February, but there were still no updates on the status of the PC and Xbox Live Arcade versions.

The following statement finally appeared on Game Room's Facebook page on 18 February: "We are wholly focused on the mobile extension right now. We are also sorting through the bigger plan for Game Room, but expect us to be dark on that topic for a while because we have a lot to work through. I wish there was more to say at this time, but this is the situation as it stands for now. I cannot emphasize enough how much we appreciate your support. Thank you."

> "It would appear Microsoft isn't done with retro games yet"

As enjoyable as Game Room was, it was let down by a lack of support, with companies such as Sega, Namco, Taito, Capcom and SNK nowhere to be seen. 1,000 titles were initially promised over a three-year period, which now looks unlikely. We've asked several times for comments from Microsoft and the recently disbanded Krome Studios about the service's future, but have so far received no response.



While it's good to see Game Room isn't entirely out of the picture, we can't help but wonder if the Windows Phone version is just an opportunity to re-release the games that are available on the PC and Live Arcade. It would appear that Microsoft isn't done with retro games yet though; rumours suggest a retro-style section of Live Arcade called Classics Live will be launched to complement this year's Summer of Arcade.

We'll have more on both Classics Live and Game Room as they develop. In the meantime we're off to set some high scores on *Amidar*. *



Game Room: Your thoughts?

I'd want more games and publishers in the future – 18%

I disliked everything about it – 4%

It was fun while it lasted – 7%

Great idea, poorly executed – 71%

"It definitely had potential, but somewhere along the process between the idea and bringing it to life something when seriously wrong. Points for trying, but no dice!!"
– Retrosofer

"Newer games were needed, not just a huge amount of crappy 2600/ Intellivision games that just don't hold up today no matter how many pairs of rose tinted specs you wear."
– The Last Ginja





» Serious sequel

Croteam recently announced that *Serious Sam 3* will be arriving later this year. While no firm details were released, CEO Roman Ribaric simply stated that "*Serious Sam 3: BFE* is coming in summer 2011". As with *Duke Nukem*, the *Serious Sam* games have always been extremely tongue-in-cheek shooters and a lot of fun, so we're really looking forward to seeing how Sam's latest close encounter will pan out.



» Command and sequel

Electronic Arts has recently revealed that a brand new *Command & Conquer* game is on the way. Little information about the new title is available at the moment other than that it will definitely be available for the PC – *C&C4: Tiberian Twilight* was a PC exclusive – and that it is being created by newly created studio Victory Games. Expect more information in the coming months.



» More tales from Telltale

Things are certainly going well for Telltale Games at the moment. In addition to *Back To The Future* and *Jurassic Park*, it has also announced five more games. *Fables* and *The Walking Dead* are based on comics, while *Puzzle Agent 2* and *Hector: Badge Of Carnage* are sequels to previous iPhone games. Best of all, however, is the news of a brand new *King's Quest* adventure. More news at it happens.

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Pac-Man Seat

- **RRP:** info@qayot.it
- **Buy it from:** www.qayot.it

Thanks to being simple in his design, Pac-Man really does get everywhere. He's on everything from MP3 player cases and hot plate handlers to the obligatory mugs, stickers and wall decals that seem to be par for the course for retro gaming characters these days, and by trawling the internet for nothing in particular we often stumble across some new product that has been knowingly based on the yellow malformed circle. Well, this month we decided to highlight a slightly more luxurious item. Available in two colours – red or white – these stylish modular seating sets pay tribute to the character in a way that we suspect even Kevin McCloud would champion. Due to their geometric design, multiple seats can be slotted together to create a variety of super seats in a range of styles that are sure to add a level of retro gaming chic to any room. However, be warned that the manufacturer's website doesn't list a price, and they're Italian-made. We're guessing that they're not cheap.



G&W Parachute T-Shirt

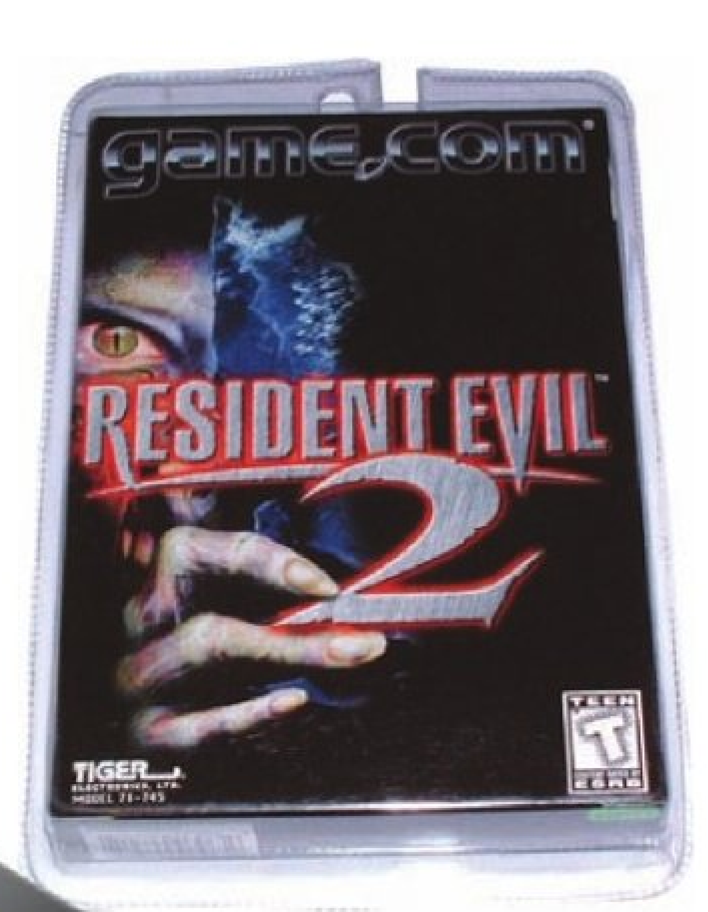
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

Given their timelessness, it always surprises us that we don't see more Game & Watch merchandise getting released. Well, Retro GT is looking to redress the balance a little this month with this T-shirt, which has been inspired by the Nintendo portable game series, and, more explicitly, the G&W game *Parachute*. For those who haven't played the game, it's one in which you play a fisherman who spends his days fishing for skydivers that are dropped from a helicopter rather than trawling for fish and lobsters. Anyway, here's a grey T-shirt based on his actions.

Resident Evil 2 Game.com

- **RRP:** £19.95
- **But it from:** www.retro-play.co.uk

Those who remember reading our feature on the Game.com quite a few issues back will probably also remember that there were very few games released for the handheld. If you're a collector with very little space and even less patience, though, it's a perfect console for you to start buying for. If you do treat yourself to one then you may want to pay a visit to Retro Play, as they have a decent selection of games for the system for sale, including *Resident Evil 2*, one of its more popular titles. We can't think why, though. *Resident Evil 2* was pretty good and all that, but it was no *Blue Stinger*.



Joystick-IT iPad Arcade Stick

- **RRP:** $24.99 (£15) each or $39.99 (£25) for two
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

We've lost count of the number of times we've written in iPad reviews: "We just wish the controls were a little more responsive," or "We wish we could bolt a couple of aluminium arcade sticks onto the glass to make it look like we're controlling a model helicopter." Now we're not entirely sure how these work, but if you're an iPad owner who is gutted to find that the tablet has touch-screen controls – or you want to stand in a field and pretend to be the owner of a model helicopter – you might want to give ThinkGeek some of your wages this month for a couple of these.



Shoot-'Em-Up Sticker Set

■ **RRP:** £4.50
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

If you find those fancy wall decals that we often feature here a bit expensive, why not treat yourself to this set of stickers inspired by classic arcade shmups at a fraction of the cost. They're not taken from any game in particular, but to be honest ships, weapons and explosions tend to all look the same anyway. Although these probably wouldn't offer you much of a wall decoration – in fact, from a distance, stickers this size might even look like stains – if you have a fridge, washing machine or boiler that could do with a splash of colour, these would certainly do the trick nicely.

Mario Yahtzee

■ **RRP:** $14.99 (£9)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Everybody loves the classic *Yahtzee* – a game that is essentially to poker what *Pokémon* is to animal trafficking. In fact, that odd analogy is even more ironic thanks to this bizarre *Mario Yahtzee* crossover, which basically replaces the pips on the dice with pictures of various *Mario* power-ups, and the boring dice shaker that doubles up as a plastic shot glass with a giant power-up block. We're not the betting type, but if you know someone who is both a huge fan of *Yahtzee* and *Mario*, and also above the age of eight, we'd bet the farm on them itching to get their hands on this.

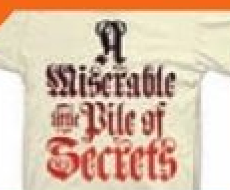


8-bit Wristwatch

■ **RRP:** $69.99 (£44)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Weirdly, none of us in the office wear wristwatches. But each member of **Retro Gamer** has a very good reason why: Stephen cannot tell time, Darran can tell bits of time and Stuart can only guess time. Because of this, all three have to rely on battery-powered talking clocks, which they have to carry around inside rucksacks. Had they paid close attention at primary school, they would have probably learned to love time and learned to love wristwatches. And had this been the direction that life had taken them, they would have undoubtedly picked up these 8-bit-themed watches this month too.

TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 A Miserable Little Pile Of Secrets T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Buy it from:** meatbun.us/store/



02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Sonic Power-ups
■ **RRP:** $14.95 (approx £10)
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

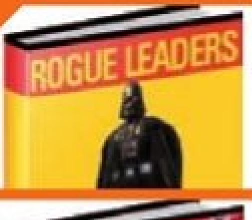


04 Coexist T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



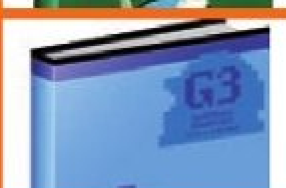
02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
■ **Author:** Brett Weiss
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



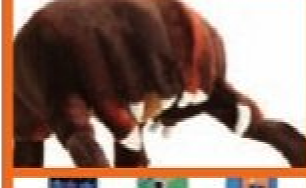
01 Mega Drive Card Holder
■ **RRP:** $34.10 (approx £21)
■ **Manufacturer:** Banpresto
■ **Buy it from:** www.strapya-world.com



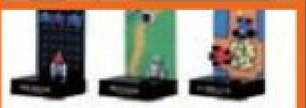
02 Grow Your Own Moai Statue (aka DOH)
■ **RRP:** $5.99 (£4)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



03 Retro Videogame Propaganda Posters
■ **RRP:** £33 ■ **Manufacturer:** Steven Thomas ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Namco Dioramas
■ **RRP:** £5
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO W



* A MOMENT WITH...

Andreas Axelsson

Every issue we put an industry veteran in the hotseat. This month, we talk to the DICE co-founder and Amiga pinball mastermind...

Who is Andreas Axelsson?

He's one of the co-founders of Digital Illusions CE and started off as part of the Amiga demo group, The Silents. He is most well known for being the coder on the popular *Pinball* games (*Dreams, Fantasies* and *Illusions*) for the Commodore Amiga.

Which of your games would you recommend and why?
I'd recommend *Pinball Fantasies* because it's a really minimal game that still provides a lot of fun 18 years after it was released.

What's your proudest achievement?
I went to watch the PLAY! concert in Stockholm, and the Royal Stockholm Symphony Orchestra played the *Battlefield* theme song for a full house. That was the one defining moment when I realised how far DICE had come from the bedroom project it started out as. Ironically, I'd handed in my resignation a month before.

And your biggest disappointment?
Digging out memory corruption bugs in a shipping build is probably one of the most challenging things one can encounter. They're usually real Heisenbugs too.

Which other industry veteran do you most admire and why?
No matter whom I pick it'll be unfair to someone else, but I'll say Shigeru Miyamoto. I don't think I've spent more time with any other developer's games over so many consecutive years.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
I hope my games will be remembered as the ones that made you lose a lot of sleep.

What game do you wish you had made and why?
System Shock 2, because I had a similar idea that I really liked at the time it came out. The same goes for *Eve Online*. We were seriously discussing a similar project at DICE around 1995, the same time as CCP begun their work on it, but we ended up doing *Motorhead*. Finally *Ico*, because it's such a beautiful and emotional game.

What opportunities has making games given you?
The opportunity to work with a lot of very talented people from all over the world while having so much fun creating things that so many people enjoy.

What's your best memory of being in the industry?
Handing in the boxed copy of *Pinball Dreams* along with Xeroxes of top-score reviews and an essay on assembler games programming to my computer teacher in school for my graduation in secondary school. I got top grades.

» [Xbox] DICE released several different racing games, including *Midtown Madness 3*, before discovering the magic *Battlefield* multiplayer formula.

And your worst?
When money was short and we had to come up with a solution fast or a whole lot of people would lose their jobs. I'd prefer if I never had to demote or lay anyone off.

Can you share an interesting anecdote from your time in the industry?
We were a bit late finishing *True Pinball* on Saturn and PSone and I had already booked a three-month round-the-world vacation. I ended up taking along a printout of the entire source code. I'd occasionally check in with the guys back home if there were any outstanding bugs. I'd then fix them on paper, usually in the office of some phone company or outside a phone booth, and call back with the solution before heading back to the beach.

» [Amiga] The *Pinball* trilogy became a huge success for Digital Illusions, but did tie the developer to the genre rather heavily.



How has the industry changed in the past 20 years?
Teams and budgets have increased from mostly few-man teams into today's triple-A teams of several hundred people. However, Xbox Live Arcade, PlayStation Network and the iPhone have brought the ability back for small teams to create new and inspiring games. In addition, we have a whole different audience than 20 years ago. Women and casual gamers of all ages are now something to take into account, while back then you could envision a teenage boy and cover 90 per cent of the market. *

1 April – 28 April

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



1 April 1983
■ Ultimate's *Pssst* makes an unsuccessful transition to the Atari 2600, with the conversion pulled two weeks before release.



2 April 1984
■ Software Projects' sequel to *Manic Miner* is finally rushed to release. *Jet Set Willy* (bugs included) changes Spectrum gaming forever.



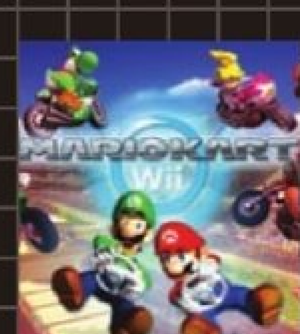
6 April 1984
■ Micromega's *Codename Mat*, an early 3D space game which balanced strategy with action, is released on the ZX Spectrum.



7 April 1986
■ Sinclair Research sells its computer range and the Sinclair brand name to Amstrad for a reported £5 million.



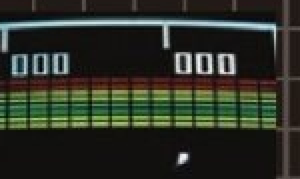
8 April 2004
■ *Metroid Zero Mission* is released in the United Kingdom exclusively on the Game Boy Advance.



10 April 2008
■ *Mario Kart* for the Nintendo Wii is released across Europe. Red shells at the ready…



12 April 2001
■ *Banjo-Tooie*, the platform action adventure sequel to *Banjo-Kazooie*, is released in the UK on the N64.



13 April 1976
■ Apple co-founders Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak design *Breakout*, a new arcade game released by Atari.



15 April 1988
■ *RC Pro Am* is released by Rare on the NES across Europe.



16 April 1984
■ New software house Gargoyle Games releases its first game on the Spectrum, the shoot-em-up offering *Ad Astra*.



18 April 2011
■ Europe awaits the hotly anticipated release of *Mortal Kombat* on the PS3 and Xbox 360.



19 April 1982
■ *Dig Dug* hits the arcades thanks to Namco. Time to dispense some Pookas to *Dig Dug* heaven…



21 April 1984
■ *Duck Hunt* on NES is released in Japan. The UK version arrives just three and a half years later.



21 April 1989
■ Nintendo's Game Boy and *Super Mario Land* are released in Japan. *Super Mario Land* becomes one of the biggest selling games ever.



21 April 2003
■ The European release of *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, the fourth game in the Panzer series, arrives exclusively on Xbox.



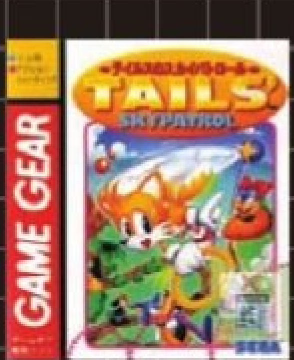
22 April 2004
■ SNK's *Samurai Showdown V Special* for the Neo Geo was released. It was the last official game released for the ageing system.



22 April 2011
■ *Portal 2*, the sequel to the original portal-jumping puzzle game, should hit the shops on PS3, Xbox 360 and PC.



25 April 1995
■ Japanese coin-op fast shooting weirdness aplenty with the arcade release of the wonderfully bizarre *Parodius* by Konami.



28 April 1995
■ *Tails' Skypatrol*, released only in Japan and exclusively on Sega's Game Gear, is a platform adventure from the *Sonic The Hedgehog* franchise.



28 April 2011
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.



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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

» [Commodore 64] Dalglish is back and managing Liverpool. What year is it again?

» [Amstrad] Ideal movie fodder for a game, but *Nightbreed* was just too confusing, both graphically and gameplay-wise.



» [PC] You could play *International Karate* until you were blue in the face. Handily, your fighter is already there.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1989

MAY 89 – BBC's last Acorn, PC OutRun crashes and burns, Ocean faces a Hit Squad, Imagine once again turns Renegade while Screen 7 debuts with a byte-sized shark. Richard Burton reckons we're gonna need a bigger RAM pack…

Acorn revealed its latest home micro, the BBC A3000, although it wouldn't officially go on sale until the BBC Acorn User Show at the end of July. Despite being one of the most powerful home computers of its time, being part of the Archimedes family, the vast majority of systems in use were to be found in schools as part of the ongoing Computer Literacy Project run by the BBC. In fact, the A3000 was the final Acorn micro to carry the BBC badge for the project.

Acorn attempted to make inroads into the home user market by styling the A3000 in a similar vein to the Amiga and Atari ST with a combined base unit and keyboard, but at £799 it priced itself out of the market. The lack of quality games was a major concern, with notable exceptions being *Zarch* and *Elite*. Needless to say, the perennial stalwart of Acorn educational gaming, *Granny's Garden*, made its customary appearance on the new micro.

PC gamers may have felt marginalised when it came to the lack of chart-topping coin-op releases for their systems. A mere 18 months after US Gold had utterly bungled its *OutRun* licence on virtually every system it had converted for, the new £25 PC release had finally arrived.

You would think, after the bunch of arse that was the Amstrad CPC and Atari ST releases, that US Gold might have learnt a lesson in quality control. Well, despite being visually pleasing and coping well with the *OutRun* soundtrack, the gameplay once again left fans of Sega's classic racer frustrated and let down.

US Gold had more *OutRun* news when it divulged that it was busily working on the sequel, *OutRun Europa*, with Probe Software drafted in again to do the coding. Best not get your hopes up…

Shortly afterwards, US Gold bought the rights to *Turbo OutRun*, the more recent and supposedly better arcade game, meaning that *OutRun Europa* would be put on the back burner, even though coding was virtually completed. It was eventually released two and a half years later.

PC gamers, despite being given the short straw with *OutRun*, had their hopes raised that another belated release, this time System 3's *International Karate*, would be worth the wait and numb the pain of *OutRun*. It didn't, and although the gameplay moved at a quick pace, the hideous CGA graphics featuring your cyan-faced fighter and garish backdrops left your eyes and head throbbing in equal measure.

Ocean Software revealed details of a new budget label that it was about to launch. Hit Squad would see many of Ocean's past offerings re-released at a price of £2.99. Each would fall into one of three categories – arcade, movie or sports collections – and would be numbered to encourage gamers to collect the entire

» [MSX] Da dun. Da dun. Dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun…

» [PC] US Gold thoroughly stiffed the 8-bit micro owners with its versions of *OutRun*. Now it was the PC owners' turn…

MAY 1989 NEWS



» *Moonlighting*: Four seasons, 66 episodes and yet not one "Yippie ki-yay, motherf…"

4 May saw the Space Shuttle Atlantis launch the Magellan spacecraft into space, where it would take 15 months to travel to Venus and would begin creating the first photograph-quality radar-mapped plan of the planet's surface. It took five years to complete the mission before Magellan was lost in the atmosphere of Venus in October 1994.

On 14 May the popular American comedy drama series *Moonlighting* ended. It ran for over four years, spanning five seasons, and made stars out of the two leads: Bruce Willis as David Addison and Cybill Shepherd as Maddie Hayes. They ran a detective agency, Blue Moon Investigations, which saw a blend of drama and mystery combined with fast-paced dialogue. Although the two partners argued constantly throughout, one of the attractions to the show was the ongoing sexual tension between the two.



» *Time Team* was never like this…

24 May brought the world premiere of *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*. The third outing for the eminent Dr Jones (Harrison Ford) introduced his father (Sean Connery) in a quest to locate the Holy Grail. As well as fighting off the obligatory swarms of Nazis and solving ingenious deadly traps, they both found time to conduct separate 'adventures' with the stunning blonde Nazi Dr Elsa Schneider (Alison Doody). Good digging, lads…

series. The first three releases in each category were *Enduro Racer*, *Rambo* and *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*.

Ocean also had news that it had bought the licence to Clive Barker's *Nightbreed*. With the movie still in production, a simultaneous release seemed on the cards and, judging by the press releases, the game was going to feature a host of weird creatures. However, Ocean was at pains to point out that there would be no blood or gore, which would influence any age rating and impinge on its bottom line.

Another of Ocean's movie-licensed titles, the Schwarzenegger vehicle *Red Heat*, was also nearing completion and, according to programmer Jonathan Smith, it would be a four-level horizontal-scrolling beat/shoot-'em-up affair similar to *Green Beret*. Hopefully it wasn't too similar, as that was also coded by Jonathan Smith.

Imagine Software had news of the pending release of the recently completed third game in the *Renegade* series. There was more scrolling beat-'em-up action as *Renegade III* squeezed the last bit of gaming goodness out of the franchise. On this occasion you are travelling through time to rescue your girlfriend by battling your way through Egyptian, prehistoric, future and medieval levels. It sounded more like *The Crystal Maze* than *Renegade* and, sadly, it was by far the worst of the games in the series.



» [Spectrum] Not sure why this rated so highly as it was gash compared to *Renegade* and *Target Renegade*.

New software label Screen 7, owned by Software Communications, which had only recently let its other software label, Martech, fold, revealed that its first release would be an officially licensed game based on *Jaws*. Good subject matter, but the huge playing area would lead to familiarity and boredom as you searched for the four parts of the weapon required to kill the shark. A mixed bunch of releases followed, with the Spectrum version faring best.

Football games seemed to be high on the agenda of software houses, with a selection of endorsed titles being flavour of the month. *Gary Lineker's Hot-Shot!* was coming soon courtesy of Gremlin Graphics. *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* was imminent thanks to Audiogenic, as was *Kenny Dalglish's Soccer Manager* from Zeppelin. They were all hoping to wrestle a piece of the pie from the likes of the recently released and more arcade-based *MicroProse Soccer* and Anco's *Kick Off*. So much football and the World Cup was still a full year away…

Computer & Video Games' reviewing team ran their rule over the new releases and judged that *Dominator* (System 3, Spectrum), *3D Pool* (Firebird, C64), *Run The Gauntlet* (Ocean, Spectrum), *Typhoon Thompson* (Domark, Atari ST), *Captain Flapper's House Of Cheese* (Dragon 32), *King's Quest IV* (Activision/Sierra Online, Atari ST), *California Games* (Sega, Master System) and *Motor Roader* (NEC, PC Engine) should all have you digging deep into your wallet.

THIS MONTH IN…

COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



CVG looked at the newest console in Japan, Sega's Mega Drive. Having received rave reviews and a list of coin-op conversions, the anticipation for the UK release was high. However, that was still another 18 months away…

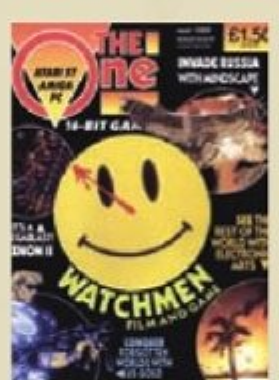


CRASH

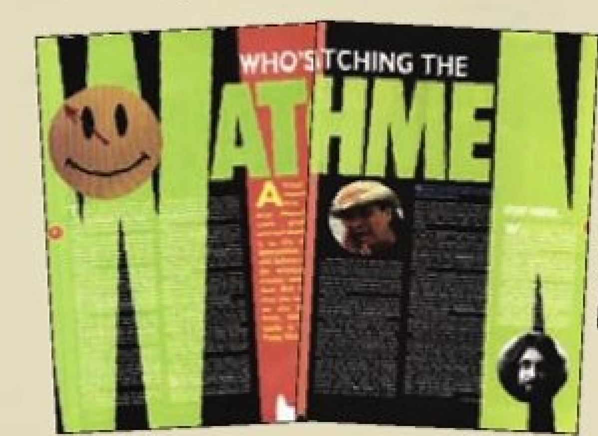
Crash featured Mastertronic's Andrew Wright talking about the process of submitting games for evaluation and what happens once they receive them. With 40 games a week sent to Mastertronic, a game needed to stand out. Sadly, many did for the wrong reason – testers found they just wouldn't load.



THE ONE



Terry Gilliam was to direct the film version of the seminal graphic novel *Watchmen*, with filming due to start in September. Furthermore, there was exciting news from DC Comics that Ocean Software had already acquired the licence to create a game of the film.



CHARTS

MAY 1989

SPECTRUM

1. RoboCop (Ocean)
2. After Burner (Activision)
3. Operation Wolf (Ocean)
4. Thunder Blade (US Gold)
5. Formula Grand Prix (Alternative)

AMSTRAD

1. Treasure Island Dizzy (Codemasters)
2. RoboCop (Ocean)
3. Twin Turbo V8 (Codemasters)
4. Joe Blade 2 (Players)
5. Giants (US Gold)

AMIGA

1. Super Hang-On (Electric Dreams)
2. Falcon (Mirrorsoft)
3. Lombard RAC Rally (Mandarin)
4. Sword Of Sodan (Discovery Software)
5. TV Sports Football (Mirrorsoft)

MUSIC

1. Ferry 'Cross The Mersey (Marsden, McCartney, Johnson & The Christians)
2. Hand On Your Heart (Kylie Minogue)
3. Miss You Like Crazy (Natalie Cole)
4. Requiem (London Boys)
5. Bring Me Edelweiss (Edelweiss)





BACK TO THE NINETIES



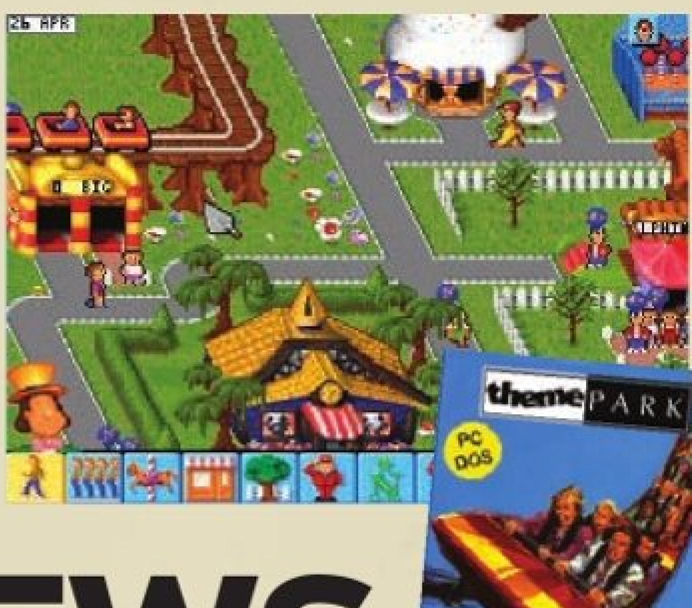
» [Mega Drive] *The Chaos Engine* converts from Amiga to Mega Drive and loses none of its playability or appeal.

CHARTS

NOV 1993

MEGA DRIVE	
1	Jungle Strike (Electronic Arts)
2	Micro Machines (Codemasters)
3	Bubsy (Accolade)
4	Populous 2 (Electronic Arts)
5	PGA Tour Golf 2 (Electronic Arts)

» [PC] *Theme Park* was quirky and humorous, making construction and management more fun than it should be.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 1993

NOVEMBER 1993 – Ocean kills Monsters, Rise Of The Robots causes sinking feeling, Theme Park opens, Nintendo promises Project Reality while Virtua Fighter takes on Street Fighter in coin-op land. Richard Burton gets a pound's worth of 10p pieces…

It had received glowing previews, had appeared in demo form on a cover disk, been advertised in the press and the game itself was virtually complete – so why did Ocean Software pull the plug and scrap its Amiga game *Universal Monsters*?

The game itself was to be an isometric affair celebrating all that was spooky and good about Universal Studios and its amazing history of movie monsters. With the golden anniversary of the studio not far away, the game seemed like a good idea and potential money-spinner for Ocean. Sadly, after two years of frustrating development, coding problems and the *Universal Monsters* franchise floundering, Ocean said enough was enough and terminated the project.

A game many people wish had remained unreleased but was near completion was *Rise Of The Robots*. Mirage revealed that its new fighting game would be ready sometime early in 1994 as its in-house programming team, Instinct Software, put the finishing touches to the game. Previews seemed to indicate that something quite special was coming, but reality would soon put that right…

On paper the ray-traced rendered graphics of the robotic fighters looked fantastic. Alas, when the game finally saw the light of day in early 1995, Instinct may as well have served us up a turd on a velvet cushion. It was awful. You couldn't fault the graphics, but you could certainly fault everything else. Let's hope those Amiga and assorted console owners who bought it kept their receipts handy…

Electronic Arts had got Bullfrog Productions to develop its next game, which meant that the mad genius of Peter Molyneux would be unleashed once again. The project was *Theme Park*, a management simulation where you can build an amusement park from scratch, even down to the mundane stuff such as basic infrastructure.

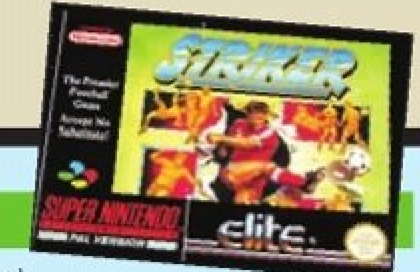
You could then build your attraction by buying better facilities like refreshment and merchandise stalls and upgrading amusements from bouncy castles to roller coasters as the money began rolling in. With different types of customers to keep happy as well as staff to employ such as cleaners and security, it all made for a fun yet challenging simulation game. *Theme Park* was eventually released in late 1994 across a varied selection of systems including the Macintosh, Atari Jaguar, Sega Mega-CD and Saturn, and was a success across the board.

Amiga and ST owners had been playing and loving the Bitmap Brothers' latest, the multi-character, multi-scrolling shoot-'em-up tinged with a hint of *Gauntlet*, *The Chaos Engine*, since the beginning of the year, and now those Bitmaps were busily working on SNES and Mega Drive versions of the game. Although



» [Amiga] *Rise Of The Robots*? What were they thinking?

» [Commodore 64] *Mayhem In Monsterland* received a perfect score in *Commodore Format*'s review. Eyebrows were raised.



SNES

1 Striker (Elite)
2 Starwing (Nintendo)
3 Alien 3 (LJN)
4 Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)
5 Batman Returns (Konami)

MASTER SYSTEM

1 Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (Sega)
2 Tecmo World Soccer (Sega)
3 Lemmings (Sega)
4 Land Of Illusion (Sega)
5 World Tournament Golf (Sega)

MUSIC

1 I'd Do Anything For Love (But I Won't Do That) (Meat Loaf)
2 Please Forgive Me (Bryan Adams)
3 Don't Be A Stranger (Dina Carroll)
4 True Love (Elton John & Kiki Dee)
5 Got To Get It (Culture Beat)

I'D DO ANYTHING FOR LOVE (BUT I WON'T PLAY HALO)

NOVEMBER 1993 NEWS

1 November saw the start of the trial of Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, the two 11-year-old killers of toddler James Bulger, who had been brutally murdered in February after being abducted from a shopping centre in Bootle.

The two boys denied all charges but the evidence was overwhelming and they were found guilty of murder on 24 November, becoming the youngest convicted killers of the 20th Century. They served eight years and were released on a life licence with new identities and moved to secret locations, such was the continuing anger and revulsion of the public over their crimes.


» You wouldn't like him when he's angry…

21 November brought the death of Wilfred Bailey Everett Bixby III. To millions he was better known as Bill Bixby, the television actor who portrayed Dr David Banner in *The Incredible Hulk* television series, which ran for four years. Bixby's other credits included directing several episodes of the US comedy police show *Sledge Hammer*.

In 1991 Bixby was diagnosed with prostate cancer and, following treatment, was given the all-clear. Sadly a reoccurrence in 1993 was diagnosed as terminal.

5 November saw the US premiere of the third instalment of the half-man, half-robot future of law enforcement, *RoboCop 3*, which saw Robert John Burke replace Peter Weller in the role of RoboCop/Alex Murphy. The movie turned out to be a right royal stinker and flopped badly at cinemas. Let's hope the much-mooted fourth movie in the franchise is better…

released fashionably late, they were every bit as good as the home micro versions.

The console versions were also made available in the US of A but were released with a new title: *Soldiers Of Fortune*. The Preacher character was also replaced by the Scientist. Those tinkering Americans…

Meanwhile, in the arcades of Japan two new games had just been released. Both were fighting games – one an updated classic and the other a feisty new boy with a different style and perspective.

Capcom had just released *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers*, which kept the original 12 characters from *Street Fighter II Turbo* but also introduced four new ones, including Cammy, a teenage special forces agent for British Intelligence.

It also had much-improved graphics and sound due to Capcom's first outing of its new CPS-2 hardware. It looked to be the future of fighting games… that was until Sega released *Virtua Fighter*.

Dispensing with the 2D graphics that were the standard for the genre, *Virtua Fighter* instead introduced 3D polygonal graphics rendered in real-time, and the result rejuvenated the fighting genre.

Needless to say, several sequels to *Virtua Fighter* followed, although the honour of the first home version would go to the Sega Saturn. That said, you would still have to wait a full year for the release of the console… and then initially only in Japan.

Nintendo revealed details of two new consoles that it planned to release. Details were limited but the first would be a 64-bit console, created with help from Silicon Graphics, to produce real-time 3D graphics and tentatively called Project Reality.

The second machine planned was a portable Super Famicom made by Bandai called the Home Entertainment Terminal, which would consist of a SNES with built-in four-inch LCD screen and TV tuner. A prototype had been seen at a Japanese trade fair, but despite an enthusiastic reception it was never released. Project Reality fared better, and two years later was released in Japan as the Nintendo 64.

SNES Force graded the latest releases for the Super Nintendo and the top rankers were *Goof Troop* (Capcom), *Zombies* (Konami), *Top Gear 2* (Kemco), *Equinox* (Sony Imagesoft), *Sunset Riders* (Konami), *Mega Lo Mania* (Imagineer/Sensible), *Rock N' Roll Racing* (Interplay), *Wing Commander: The Secret Missions* (Mindscape), *Might And Magic II* (Elite) and *Super Putty* (System 3).

Its sister magazine, *Sega Force Mega*, didn't have as much to impress this month according to the reviewing team. The best of the bunch were *Wimbledon* (Sega), *Gunstar Heroes* (Treasure) and *NHL Hockey '94* (Electronic Arts).

Commodore Format, which had been chronicling Apex Computer Productions' ongoing development of *Mayhem In Monsterland*, the beautiful, fast-paced scrolling platform game for the Commodore 64, finally had a full review of the finished game and, controversially, gave it a maximum score of 100%.

Was it all hype? A marketing ploy or some such shenanigans? As superb as it was, did *Mayhem In Monsterland* really deserve a perfect score? Do you know what? It probably did…


» [Amiga] Ocean's isometric *Universal Monsters* game promised much but ultimately remained unreleased.



» [Mega Drive] Save your neighbours from the zombies and escape. A bit *Gauntlet*-esque in style but good fun.

THIS MONTH IN…

NINTENDO POWER

American mag *Nintendo Power* featured an article on Nintendo's latest console, the 64-bit Project Reality, where it spoke about the collaboration with Silicon Graphics, famous for its CGI in films such as *Jurassic Park*. The N64 had great graphics… but not that great…



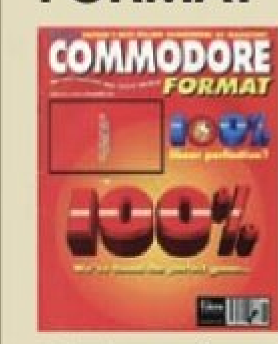
SUPER PLAY



Continuing the Project Reality theme, *Super Play* interviewed Silicon Graphics' Steve Webb about the deal with Nintendo. When asked if the console would be a VR machine, the response was: "It will be able to do astonishing VR things and much more."



COMMODORE FORMAT



With *Mayhem In Monsterland* receiving a maximum review score, *CF* had to justify the percentage. "Is this the perfect game? No. The best game you'll see on a C64 this decade or next? Yes."







Landstalker – The Treasures Of King Nole

WHO SAID NIGEL DOESN'T SOUND LIKE A HERO'S NAME?

#36

» MEGA DRIVE
» CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT
» 1992

Meet Nigel the elf and his pint-sized companion Friday. They learn that King Nole's mythical treasures may actually exist and embark on this huge and gorgeous-looking isometric adventure-RPG to find them. I was immediately hooked on this game back in the day and it remains a firm favourite of mine.

First off, if you like a good challenge this one definitely won't disappoint. There are enough relatively simple sections to get you used to the game and addicted to how brilliantly it all looks and plays – but be warned that before long you've got one hell of a tough game on your hands. You begin encountering pretty complex dungeons, and the isometric viewpoint starts throwing up some very tricky platform sections that are made worse by there being no shadows. Quite often, it's hard even judging whereabouts a moving platform actually is on the screen. The game becomes increasingly frustrating in that your mistimed jumps soon start plummeting you ever further back, to repeat lengthier and lengthier sections countless times until you're there. Fantastic as this game is, patience is a must!

One thing that really appeals to me is the great characters and dialogue in this game. Friday and the ruthless antagonist who's trying to beat you to the treasures are extremely well-written, and it's a pleasure to wander around and see what the various NPCs in the game have to say, as so many of them ooze charm and personality and the game's a right good laugh in places.

As for Nigel, it's a refreshing change from the usual clichéd hero types to play a character who is basically just out to line his own pockets – if he happens to save a few towns from disaster, rid the world of some unpleasant monsters and rescue the odd hostage or princess along the way then so much the better! Like it.

There are certainly many, many hours of brilliant-quality gameplay here, and a good sense of accomplishment to be had from seeing this one through to the end. So if you've got the patience this is one not to be missed for fans of the genre. *





» **NAME:** STUART MCCORD
» **JOINED:** 29 DECEMBER 2010
» **LOCATION:** BRIGHTON & HOVE
» **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE



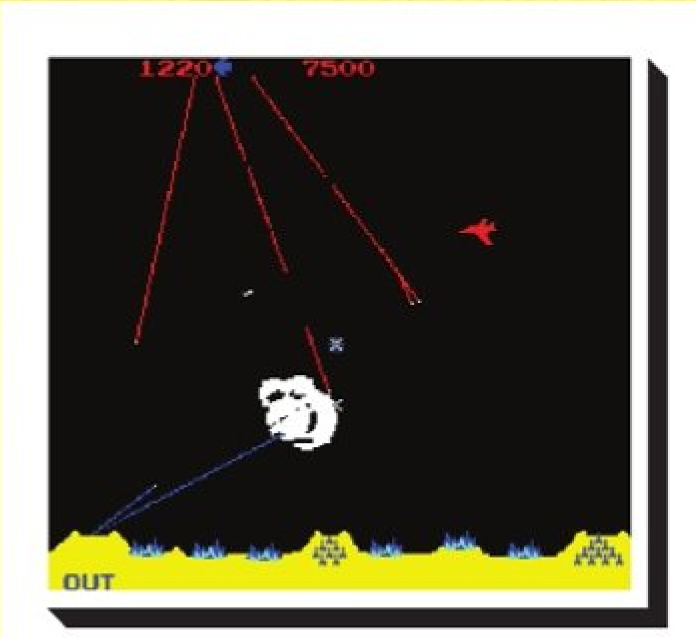
IN THE KNOW

- » **Name:** Missile Command
- » **Released:** 1980
- » **Publisher:** Atari
- » **Developer:** Dave Theurer
- » **By The Same Developer:** Tempest

COIN-OP CAPERS

#10 Missile Command

Retro Gamer takes a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravels its brilliance through those who know it best



That you're even reading this magazine means that there's a good chance you've played, or at the very least heard of, *Missile Command*. One of Atari's most popular titles from the golden age of arcade games, it saw players assume the role of a poor chap working the busiest day of his life inside a missile defence facility.

The brainchild of Atari's Dave Theurer, *Missile Command* tasks you with protecting six cities from airborne missile salvos (you can read an exclusive interview about the game's creation with Dave and Rich Adam on page 62). In the game you have access to three mounted missile launchers, which each hold ten rounds of ammunition. Activated by three fire buttons – one on the left and right of the screen, with a third in the middle – you must use them tactically and skilfully to shoot down the approaching thermonuclear missiles as precisely as possible, and play continues until the six cities you are defending are destroyed. The game starts off deceptively easy, but as missiles begin splitting into multiple targets and low-flying planes and satellites enter the picture, the gameplay soon becomes very, very hectic. It's also worth noting that *Missile Command* cannot be finished or won in any traditional sense – it is simply an endurance test between man and machine. 'The End' is therefore inevitable. Deep, man. Very deep.

Missile Command's core concept came about as a result of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. Initially there were plans to make the game as realistic as possible, as the cities you had to defend were all based on real-life locations along the Californian coastline. The cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Diego, Eureka and San Luis Obispo were all originally due to appear as the cities for each stage, but the idea to set the game on the real-life Californian coast was eventually dropped due to the potential controversy that it might create. Instead, the player ended up defending six unnamed, unrecognisable locations.

Despite its nameless setting, the game was based on the very real threat of all-out nuclear war, which was considered a distinct possibility at the time of *Missile Command*'s development period. This took its toll on the development team, though, with Dave in particular being affected by the game's theme and gruelling development schedule and suffering nightmares as a result.

Nuclear nightmares aside, there was no denying that *Missile Command* was an incredibly good game that instantly became a huge success when it was released in arcades. It became a huge money-spinner for Atari, and it has been firmly ingrained in popular culture, with the hulking cabinet appearing in everything from *Chuck* and *Fast Times At Ridgemont High* to, appropriately, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

We'd argue that *Missile Command*'s success was down to a combination of its topical setting, the popularisation of the shoot-'em-up genre that was brought about by the release of Taito's *Space Invaders*, and for also being an incredibly tight game that requires real skill to play – we've never been able to get anywhere near Tony Temple's impressive world record, no matter how many times we've tried. Undoubtedly another key aspect of *Missile Command*'s popularity was its clever implementation of a trackball. With any other control method at the helm the game just isn't the same – play it on MAME with a joypad or keyboard if you don't believe us – and this is because the ball is perfectly attuned to the game's frenetic and reaction-based gameplay, giving players an unrivalled sense of speed and precision that many other games of the time simply couldn't manage.

You need only look at the few home ports and countless unofficial clones to know that a joypad simply isn't as effective in helping you pull off the superhuman feats of dexterity that are needed to survive on the later stages and reach the highest scores. Despite the stiff challenge it poses, though, *Missile Command*'s sheer simplicity means that anybody can play it, even if few of them will ever be able to truly master it.

It remains a sensational piece of work that once again proves that the simplest of game concepts are nearly always the best. *

COIN-OP CAPERS

the expert



PROFILE

- » **Name:** Tony Temple
- » **Age:** 42
- » **Location:** Wiltshire
- » **Key Twin Galaxies World Records:** *Missile Command* [Arcade] 4,472,570; *Super Missile Command* [Arcade] 164,630



Tony Temple holds the Twin Galaxies and Guinness records on the Missile Command arcade machine, having broken a 20-year-old record to get it. Is gaming's next great rivalry under way?

When did you first encounter *Missile Command*?

Well, *Missile Command* just happened to be the main game that was sited at my local videogame emporium, Rita's Café in Bristol. This would have been in around 1981 or so. It was pure chance more than anything; the fact is that it could have been any arcade game from the golden era, I suppose. It was sat alongside a *Gorgar* pinball machine and a *Moon Cresta* upright cabinet. Rita's was a grotty old place, so with hindsight, it was a miracle they had such a prestigious game – and original too. I recall they had a lot of bootleg games over the years. I would go there, and sit with a warm, 20p milky cup of piss-weak tea, and play *Missile Command* for hours.

Why did it appeal to you?

I was drawn to it primarily because of the controls – they were pretty unique and complex for the time. I really liked the idea of having total precise control of the game in all directions. It wasn't just a case of moving left, right, up and down and one fire button – you could move the crosshair in all directions, as slow or fast as you liked, and then have to decide which of three fire buttons to use. Whereas other players were turned off by the complexity and relentlessness of the game, I just saw it as a huge challenge. And, of course, the subject matter resonated with everyone at that time – nuclear war was seen as a real possibility, and *Missile Command* I think played on many of those fears we had as kids. At 13 years old, we were all quite impressionable, I suppose, and imagining that you were saving the world probably helped my gameplay and made my desire to conquer the game greater than the older people who played it, perhaps.



When did you realise that you had a good shot at the record?

In 2005 when I got my cab, I discovered Twin Galaxies and saw that there were two types of *Missile Command* score recognised by Guinness. One was the marathon settings world record score, which was, and still is, 81 million points – to beat this would require you to play the game for over two days straight. That wasn't very appealing, to be honest – that's a test of endurance, not skill. But the other score type, known as tournament settings, looked more of a challenge. If you're familiar with *Missile Command*, you'll know that you normally get a bonus city every 10,000 points. Well, in tournament mode, you get no bonuses at all. Once the six cities are gone, that's it. The high score here was 1.69 million points, held by a guy called Roy Shildt. He'd held the score since 1984 and no one had come close since. I thought it was beatable, so changed the settings on my cab to tournament settings, and starting playing. In March 2006, I scored 1.9 million points and got into the 2007 *Guinness Book Of Records* as a result. I've since increased my world record score. In August 2010 I managed 4,472,570 points and became the first person to get past the 'kill screen' on *Missile Command* in tournament mode.

How long does it take to set your high score?

The scoring rate on *Missile Command* tournament settings is about a million points every 40 minutes or so. My current 4.4 million point world record score took just under three hours.

What sort of practice would you put in to get your score?

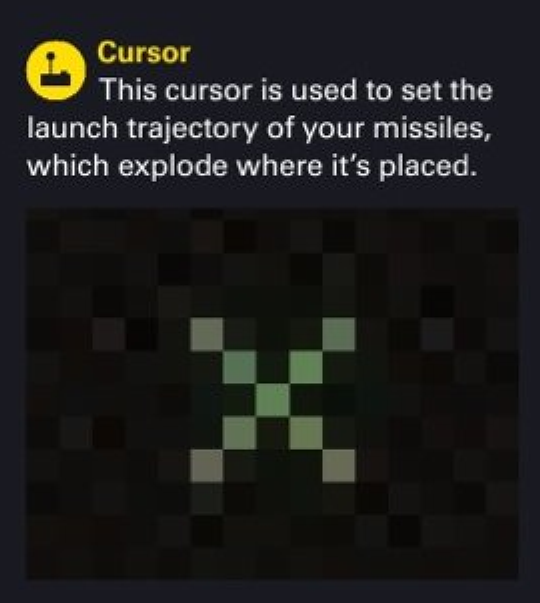
Well, being at the age I am and with a young family, a mortgage to pay and job responsibilities, not as much as I'd like. But I've been able to focus in on the game intently when I've needed to. I play very little now but do put in intensive play before playing live in the US, which a bunch of us do each year. When I went for a new world record in 2010, I played every other night for around two months. It's not a huge sacrifice, to be honest, and I wouldn't really regard it as practice – after all, every time you play, it could be 'the one' where the world record drops! The best way to learn *Missile Command* is to get in there and play it.

How did it feel to beat a record that had stood for over 20 years?

War Games

Things to look out for if under nuclear attack from a rogue nation

Cursor
This cursor is used to set the launch trajectory of your missiles, which explode where it's placed.





Cities
The object is to ensure the protection of the six identical-looking cities in the game.

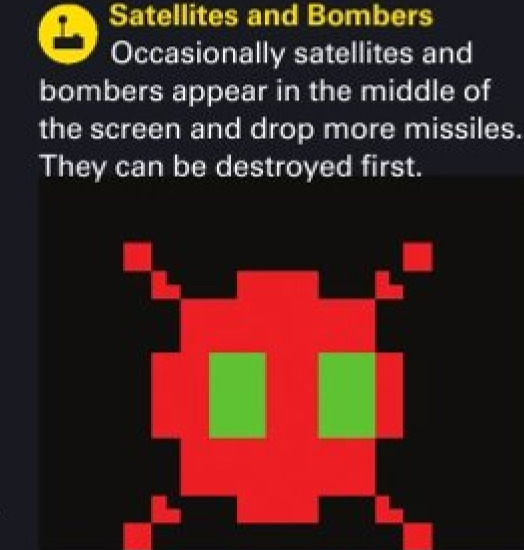
Silos
There are three defence silos at your command: Alpha, Beta and Omega. Activation of each is denoted by the three fire buttons.

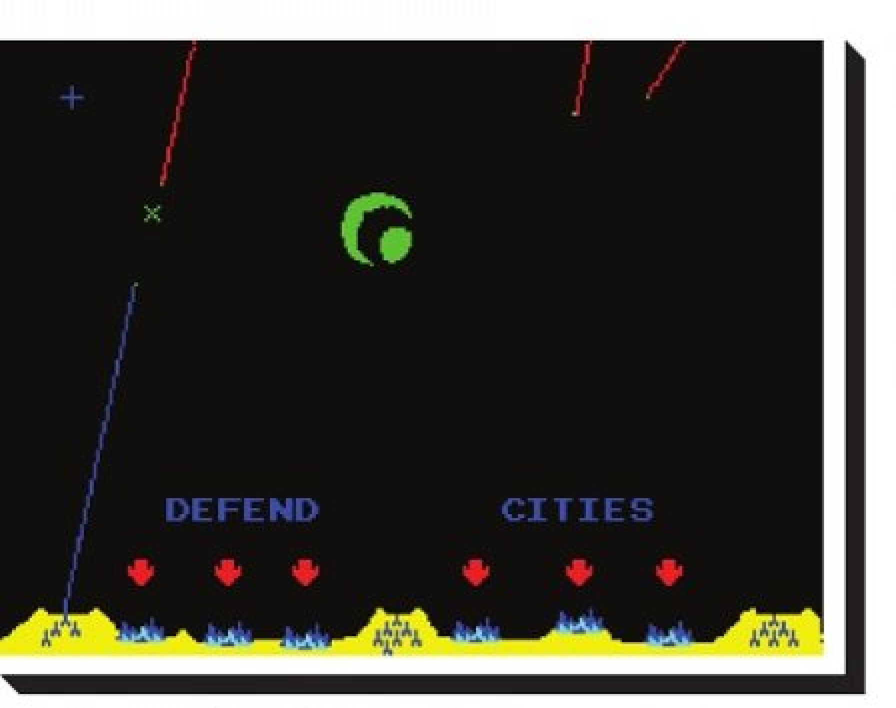




Missiles and Smart Bombs
There are two types of threat: standard missiles and smart bombs, which can sneakily change path.

Satellites and Bombers
Occasionally satellites and bombers appear in the middle of the screen and drop more missiles. They can be destroyed first.





» [Arcade] In the event of a nuclear war, we want Tony to be manning the missile shields.

It felt good, of course. It was nice to be recognised for the achievement. I wasn't splashed all over *Time* magazine or anything, but it's nice to be listed in the Guinness book. The most pleasing thing was simply beating a score that many people saw as impossible, and to start flying the flag for us here in the UK. No one had come near to the world record in over 20 years, so it was seen as big news in classic arcade gaming circles. I think it did a lot to resurrect interest in the game – I know of a few guys in the USA who went out and bought a cab as a result of seeing my score.

■ Did Roy Shildt congratulate you for beating his record?
Actually he did. As the previous record holder for over 20 years, he was surprisingly gracious – much to his credit. I don't think he was particularly happy about it – who would be? – but he acknowledged my ability, before going off on one about trackball settings, Twin Galaxies, his comic book, *The King Of Kong*, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Billy Mitchell's hot sauce. Roy tends to get a little worked up about quite mundane things. He has what I think we could call 'passion'. Or maybe he's just 5150; I'm not sure which.

■ Is it true that there's a fierce rivalry between you?
Well, I suppose there is, yes. People have built up this *King Of Kong* scenario around us – but the reality is slightly less gripping. Roy shouts loudly about *Missile Command* and Tony Temple every now and then to whoever will listen to him, and I just sort of shrug my shoulders and get on with life. Roy is a colourful character and can be pretty difficult to deal with. He'll tell you that he's the true champion, and that he could beat my score any time he likes. I've never met the guy but I suspect I will play him soon, head to head, which will be quite something. Many people want to see that happen, and I'm warming to the idea now. *

TONY'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Top tips to help you reach the finish line in record time


■ DON'T PANIC
The fundamental rule with this game is not to panic. There is a lot going on, and players tend to lose control, firing shots off all over the place. This will not help your game at all. There is no need to fire three missiles up to take out just a single one coming down! And if you are playing in marathon mode, remember you get a bonus city every 10,000 points.


■ THE RIGHT BASE
Try to use the appropriate missile base. If a missile is coming down the right-hand side of your screen, try to use your right-hand base to take it out.

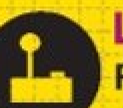
■ SAVE THE MIDDLE MISSILES
You'll notice that the missiles from the centre base do travel at a slightly faster speed than those from the side bases. Try to use your two side bases' missiles first, and save your middle ones – they come in handy when shooting down the smart bombs on the later waves. Work on your 'spreads' – a line of missile clouds you can create about halfway up the screen at the start of the later waves. This tactic buys you a bit of thinking time.


■ THE TRACKBALL
Get used to the speed of the trackball. Every one is different – some are really responsive and others you have to fight hard with. Once you've got the feel of it, you can start to play more instinctively. This is key to getting high scores. Things should start to become second nature, and you'll find yourself shooting things down without thinking about it.

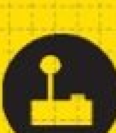

■ PLANES AND SATELLITES
As a general rule, try to shoot planes and satellites down as soon as they appear. Removing the danger early is a good idea anyway, plus the quicker you remove them, the quicker you'll get an opportunity to shoot more, generating more points.

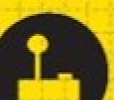
the sequels

Despite the lack of a true Missile Command 2, there are several spin-offs



Liberator
Released: 1982
Aside from *Missile Command VR* – a virtual reality offering that appeared in 1994 – there were no arcade sequels to *Missile Command*, which is very strange considering how popular it was. *Liberator*, then, is like a spiritual sequel to *Missile Command* that was based on the popular *Atari Force* comic series. The game is essentially an inverted take on the *Missile Command* concept in that players must destroy bases rather than defend them. Targets are situated on a rotating planet, and players launch their attack via four immovable spaceships that are positioned in each corner of the screen. Moving a targeting crosshair with a trackball, players must destroy all the targets before their ships are destroyed.




Super Missile Command
Released: 1994
The Lynx has many underrated gems and this is one of them. This excellent update to *Missile Command* offers all the thrills and spills of the original arcade game, but also a few neat twists too. In addition to introducing new enemies and updating the graphics rather nicely, by far the best upgrade to the game was a new power-up system whereby players were awarded money at the end of each stage, which could then be put towards specific power-ups that either boosted your missile capabilities or your defences. It's a solid follow-up that also featured a similarly decent update of *Asteroids* on the same cartridge.



Missile Command VR and 3D
Released: 1995
Missile Command 2 never got beyond the prototype stage as Atari presumably struggled with how best to extend the original concept. It would be 14 years before fans got an arcade follow-up, and this came by the unusual way of *Missile Command VR*, which ambitiously took the core gameplay and, as its title implies, blasted it into the computer-generated world of virtual reality. Split into three stages, this sequel saw players trying to defend bases from hostile alien invaders. Virtuality, the game's developer, released the game for the Atari Jaguar as *Missile Command 3D*, where it's the only title compatible with the console's VR headset.

the machine

As well as being the world champion at Missile Command, Tony is the owner of one of the most immaculate examples of the cabinet. And some of you might have even played it in the flesh...



"The machine was obtained from Archer Maclean in 2005. We were talking about what he did for a hobby – restoring and collecting old arcade machines – and this old game I was pretty good at back in the Eighties called *Missile Command*. Archer took me down into his arcade dungeon and there it was. I hadn't seen a machine in the flesh for over 20 years – I was like a kid in a candy shop. The cab was a mess – it was covered in concrete splashes, insect nests, dust and general debris. The trackball was rusted solid, there were no locks and the side art was torn and scratched. Archer won't thank me for saying this, but he spent an incredible amount of time restoring the thing for me – on and off for over a year! It was stripped, cleaned and photographed. New parts were sourced from the US, and the side art was completely rescanned, reprinted and reapplied. The attention to detail is frightening."

BUTTONS



Obviously a key element to the game! These are sealed switches that aren't made any more. The start buttons are illuminated in red; the fire buttons are standard. You can also find these buttons on the old Atari *Sprint* and *Asteroids* cabinets. Getting hold of replacements is really difficult, and as they are sealed units, they cannot be fixed. When they go, they go!

MONITOR

Standard 19-inch Wells Gardner monitor. Archer put a NOS one in during the restoration process. These raster monitors are becoming very difficult to source now. The bezel is actually smoked glass – again an idea Archer had, just to add his own signature to the restoration and the machine. This was custom made and cut at a glass factory, and had the lettering screen printed on. The bezels on standard machines are Perspex. Again, it just makes the cab a little different, but keeps it true to the original machine.

TRACKBALL

The trackball is quite a complex bit of kit and is what makes the game so challenging. The trackball itself is actually a standard candlepin bowling ball, would you believe! I have a brand new one that I must get round to fitting. It sits on two rollers on the X and Y planes. The faster you roll the ball, the faster these spin. Optical sensors track the speeds of the two rollers in relation to each other and the gubbins inside the game translate these movements to the position of your crosshair. They are pretty easy to maintain – two drops of sewing machine oil every couple of months in the bearings keeps things nice and smooth.

MARQUEE

Dave Theurer, the guy who wrote the game, is notoriously quiet and reclusive about his time at Atari. Luckily, I managed to get a lead, and via a friend, he agreed to sign some bits and pieces for me. I sent my marquee off in the post to him, and Dave very kindly signed it, as you can see. As far as I know, this is the only signed *Missile Command* marquee in the world, which makes my machine particularly unique.

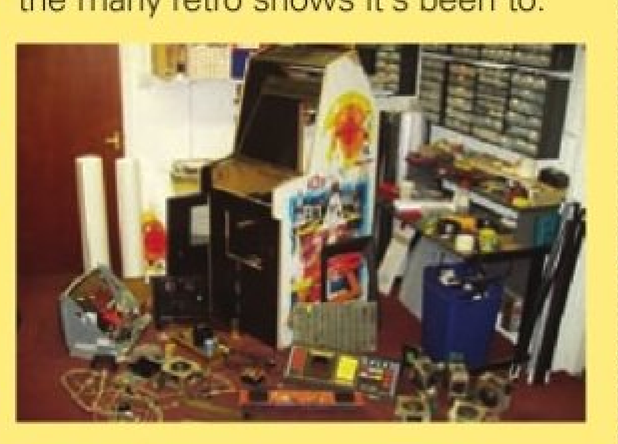
COIN SLOTS

We've kept these to take original quarters – I think they could be adapted to take UK coins. I have 20 quarters dated from 1980 – I know that's pretty nerdy, but they were a gift from Walter Day – and the coin mechanisms do work fine, but I tend to keep the machine on freeplay for ease of use. If you look closely, you'll see that Archer did a particularly personal modification for me on the coin slots themselves…



RESTORATION

Archer believes that my cab is probably of better quality than those that rolled off the production line. It wasn't cheap, but then I felt I was investing in something special. He is particularly proud of the job he did – and rightly so. I've had it for six years, and despite being moved around a fair bit and two boys in the house, it's held up well. The community estimate that there are fewer than ten *Missile Command* uprights in the country right now, so it really is a piece of history. Your readers may have played it at one of the many retro shows it's been to.



developer Q&A

We speak to Rob Fulop, the man behind two of the Atari 2600's best conversions: Space Invaders and, of course, Missile Command



How were you involved with the 2600 port?

We had a brainstorming session to come up with possible new 2600 games. On the list were two very popular Atari coin-ops, *Missile Command* and *Asteroids*, both of which were deemed impractical to pull off on the limited 2600 hardware. Over lunch, Brad Stewart started discussing various approaches to each game, and that lunch turned into a whiteboard-filled scribble-fest, after which we pitched the 2600 programming team our ideas about how both games could be done. We each were given 30 days to come up with a live 'kernel', which would display the main game elements on the screen.

Did you work with Dave Theurer on the project?

I had gotten to know Dave from the year before. Prior to my work on *Missile Command*, I had delivered a version of *Space Invaders* for the Atari 800 where I had decided to not copy the original, and my ears were ringing from the criticism that I received both from the market and my peers as a result. People just wanted the game they knew from the arcade, end of story. So when I sat down to make *Missile Command*, I decided that I would make as faithful a rendition as I possibly could. As the 2600 version was coming together, I would drop in and chat with Dave about the finer points of *Missile Command*. I remember looking at the original attack tables and the smart bomb algorithm. And, of course, the scoring system was a straight-out copy.

Did you ever receive feedback from him about the finished game? How did he feel about it?

The coin-op group was very doubtful that any sort of good game could be made on the Atari 2600. They had built all of their games on custom hardware with whatever amount of memory they needed to get the job done. I remember them being quite impressed when they played the finished game, not as much with my work, but with what was possible with the 2600 hardware. I think *Missile Command* and *Asteroids* changed people's perception of the 2600 as a development platform.

How long a deadline did you have and did any other staff work on it with you?

There was no official deadline, but it was assumed that a single game should take from 5-9 months. I think *Missile Command* was done in seven months.

What was the hardest thing about the Atari 2600 project, from a technical viewpoint?

Getting the right feel of the onslaught and figuring out how to balance the game with only one available base instead of the three in the original coin-op. It is very easy to make a game like *Missile Command* overly difficult, and it is also pretty easy to make the game very easy to beat. The trick is to find the balance between the two and craft a 'difficulty ramp' that kept getting a little harder each time. *Missile Command* taught me all about the importance of creating a dedicated system that allows the programmer to easily tweak a lot of variables. There was actually a development version of the game where I could change values on screen while the game was running. This was invaluable in finding the right combination of speeds and timing variables so that each level could deliver the challenge that was needed.

Were you happy with the final result?

Yeah, I remember adding the final explosion at the end, after the player loses, and playing it through and really feeling good about it.

Can you tell us any interesting anecdotes about your time working on the game?

One Friday, I had gone out to a long Mexican lunch with a bunch of fellow programmers, which included a few rounds of margaritas. This was a typical Friday activity, although it was unusual for me to drink, since I wasn't a big fan of drinking during the day. But for whatever reason this day I had consumed half a pitcher or so of strong margaritas. So now I basically stumble back to work at 2:15 in the afternoon, flat-out drunk. I sat down at my workstation and had the presence of mind to decide that, given my condition, it would be a good time to make a backup of my current version, which hadn't been backed up in a few weeks – all of our work was kept on eight-inch floppy disks at the time. So I dug out the *Missile Command* backup disc and put it in the spare drive next to my original development disk, which I worked off every day. Then I promptly copied my two-week-old backup version over my current version, effectively throwing away my past two weeks of work in one single drunken keystroke. I was so disgusted! Needless to say, I came in at 7:30am the next morning and worked all day Saturday and Sunday to restore the game to its pre-margarita state. Along the way I swatted a few nasty bugs that had crept into the code somehow, and overall improved a lot of the game's performance. This is typical of what happens whenever I've blown away something in a game and had to revert to an older version. Rewriting the code always improves it.

Finally, have you played any other conversions of the game? How do you think yours holds up?

I really haven't played many other versions of *Missile Command* other than my own, and the original obviously. ✱

COIN-OP CAPERS
the conversions

Appearing at a time when clones were commonplace in the market, there is an absolutely ridiculous number of official and unofficial ports of Missile Command. Join us, then, as we compare all the ports to carry the Atari seal of approval

02



01



03



01. Atari 8-Bit [Best Version]

The version that Atari put out for its 400/800 line of computers was a great effort that featured a few nice improvements over the 2600 port. This included vapour trails being left behind the enemy rockets, and the inclusion of the bombers and satellite enemies. Sadly, like all of Atari's 8-bit *Missile Command* ports, this version was missing a full complement of missile silos, limiting the depth of its gameplay. Regardless, this is still an impressive-looking conversion. Incidentally, this version also appeared as a built-in game for Atari's ill-fated XEGS console.

02. Atari 2600

Even though the Atari 2600 version is missing two silo bases, it still plays a faithful game of *Missile Command*, and what it takes with one hand – there are no bombers or satellites – it gives back with the other by allowing players to influence the behaviour of the missiles and speed of the target cursor. This port was also the first to do away with the Cold War setting, replacing it with a less contentious alien invasion scenario, as detailed in the game's manual.

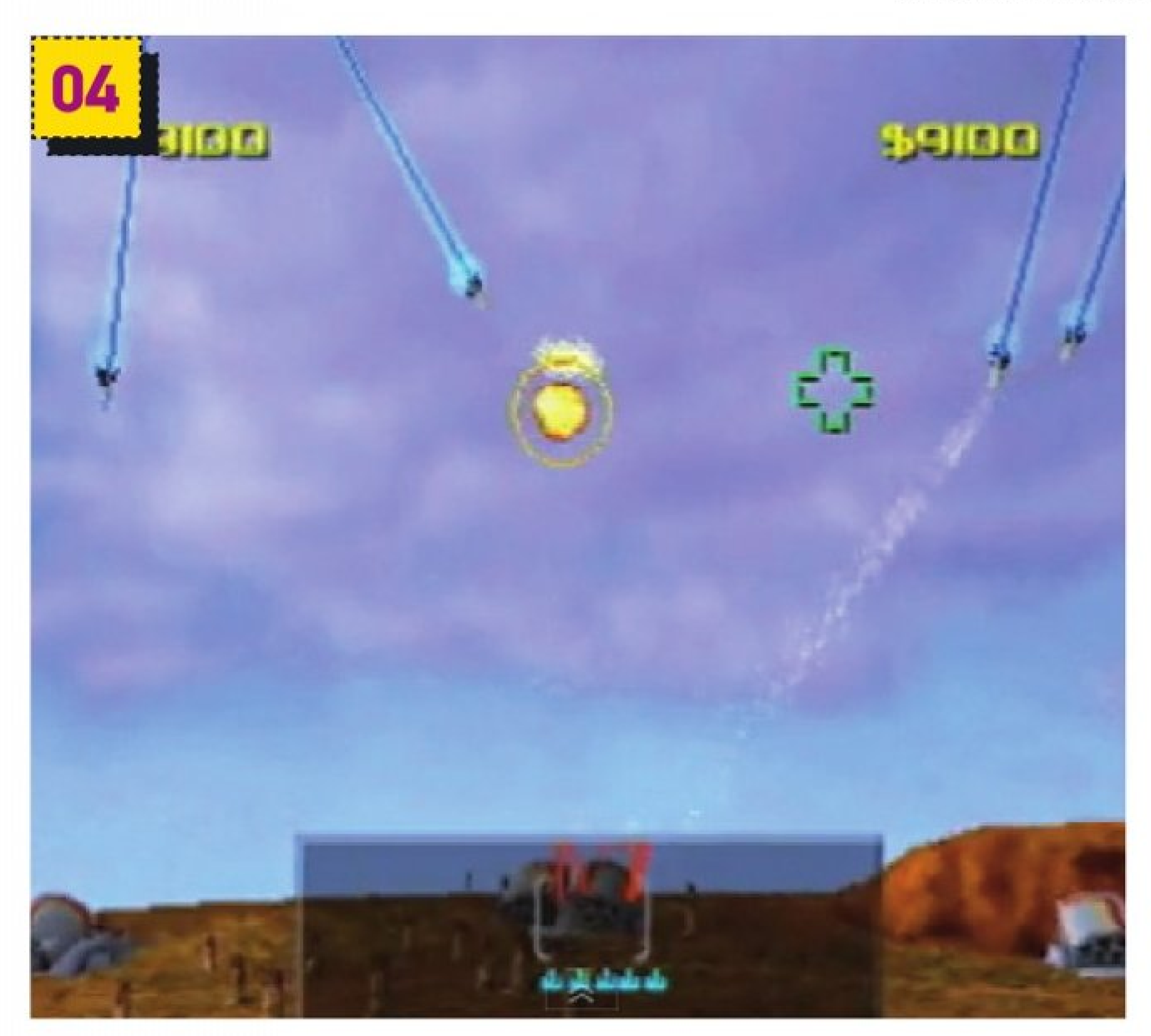
03. Atari 5200

The 5200 also received a decent conversion of *Missile Command* that featured a number of improvements over the 2600 port, although that is probably to be expected. As well as a crisper and more colourful nuclear war, this version also included the bombers and satellite enemies from the arcade game. Sadly, players still only had a single base with which to defend their six cities. As such, this version feels more like an enhancement of the Atari 2600 port rather than a more faithful arcade conversion.

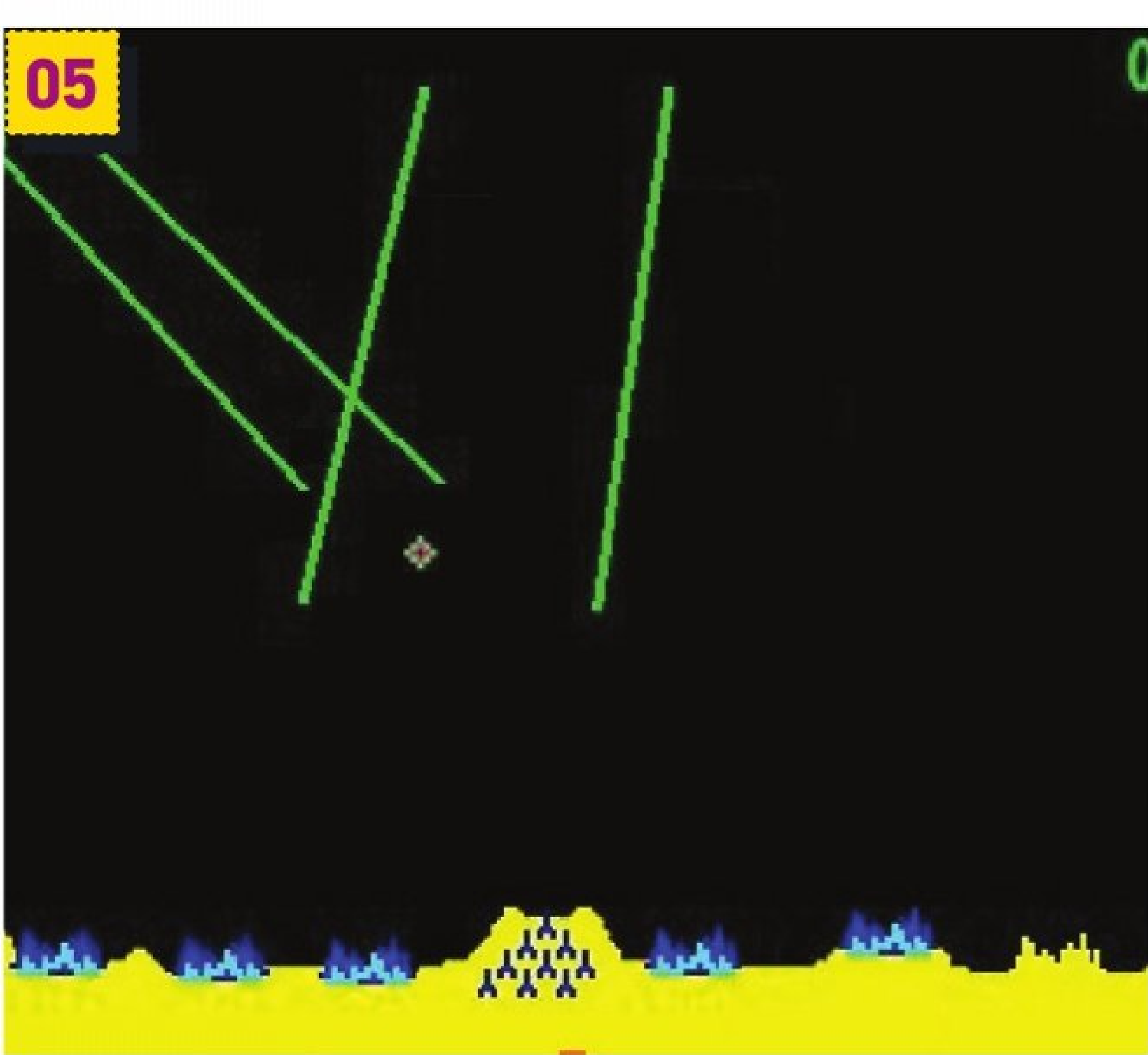
04. PC and PlayStation

This game was an official remake from Hasbro. It featured both a classic and 'ultimate' mode that swapped out the silos for spaceships and also added alien enemies, CG cut-scenes, bosses, and allowed players to spend points earned on purchasing shields and upgrading their missiles. The PC version is the one to play as it supports mouse controls. Essentially a baby trackball controller that's been

SPECIAL THANKS TO **TONY TEMPLE** FOR HIS HELP AND ASSISTANCE THROUGHOUT THIS ARTICLE









turned on its head and given buttons for feet, it's a control system that, as you would expect, works quite well for dragging cursors around the screen.

05. iPhone

Atari also released, but then oddly pulled, a decent iOS version of *Missile Command* for Apple's devices. Due to the immediate nature of touch-screen controls and its automatic silo selection, the game takes a while to get challenging, but it's still a good port. The game featured two modes, classic and ultra, with the latter throwing in new enemies and cleaning up the visuals. Atari recently plugged the gap left by its mysterious disappearance with an update called *Missile Command Ultra*. This version features redrawn graphics, allows you to dual-wield silos and includes a two-player head-to-head mode. Sadly no classic mode, though.

06. Xbox 360

As we're clearly happy to fill this page with late adaptations that push the very definition of the word 'conversion', we had to include the Xbox 360 port of *Missile Command*, which is official, is simply called *Missile Command*, and also features an obligatory graphically enhanced remake – one that supplants the missile silos with electricity pylons that direct energy into the sky. Sacrilege. The Live Arcade version does feature a classic mode that attempts to replicate the one-button-to-one-silo control system with the face buttons on the Xbox controller – it's just a crying shame movement with the analogue stick isn't all that fantastic.

07. Game Boy Color [Worst Version]

After purchasing Atari properties, Hasbro released a portable conversion of *Missile Command* for the Game Boy Color. Sadly, it was a terrible version. Here, you command two missile silos, actuated by the A and B buttons, while the target cursor is steered using the D-pad. Sadly, though, the visuals, animation and gameplay are where the game falls down. The explosions flicker, hang in the sky for ages and are too tiny. It makes the action feel far too imprecise – a big no-no for *Missile Command*.

Minority Report

Over the last few generations, gaming platforms have come and gone, and some have made a great impact; others perhaps less so. **Mike Bevan** looks at hidden gems available on some of the less mainstream systems, and cult games on some of the more well-known…

NEMESIS '90 KAI

■ SYSTEM: SHARP X68000 ■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1993

» SHARP X68000



» [Sharp X68000] *Nemesis '90* is an updated version of *Nemesis 2*.

■ **Prior to the** release of the Neo Geo, Sharp's powerhouse computer was the most advanced home system around, with capabilities remarkably close to those of arcade hardware of the time. Released only in Japan, its conversions of games like *Strider*, *Final Fight* and *Street Fighter II* far outclassed those on consoles like the SNES and Mega Drive. Alongside support from Capcom with the aforementioned titles, Konami was another A-class developer to show a keen interest in the X68000, with a unique instalment of *Castlevania* – later re-released as the PlayStation's *Castlevania Chronicles* – and authentic conversions of *Salamander* and all three *Gradius* arcade games, plus an exclusive spin-off: *Nemesis '90*.

The game is more specifically an update of the MSX title *Nemesis 2*, with enhanced arcade-quality graphics and sound, and a bunch of bonus levels thrown in. Although appearing in a similar mould to its forebears, the one main departure from the standard *Gradius* gameplay is the ability to acquire new weapon power-ups from enemy bosses. Destroying each of the end-of-stage motherships causes its centre to flash for a few seconds, allowing you to fly your ship through the narrow channel into the unprotected core. A short sub-level then follows, which, if successfully negotiated, may yield all manner of goodies, from vertical Ripple Lasers, to napalm and rebounding Moai projectiles. The new hardware is then bolted onto the traditional weapon-select bar at the bottom of the screen.

Alongside the famous *Gradius* 'multiple'-style pick-ups, you'll also run

» AMIGA CD32



» ROADKILL

■ SYSTEM: AMIGA CD32 (ALSO ON AMIGA A1200)
■ DEVELOPER: ACID SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **As top-down racers** go, this criminally overlooked title beats the likes of *Super Sprint* into a cocked hat in terms of sheer excitement and pacing. Players are thrown into a *Death Race* meets *Smash TV* world of ultra-violent motorsport, competing for cash, podium position and carnage-induced score across a series of increasingly complicated circuits. Drivers are aided to victory by *Spy Hunter*-style rockets, guided missiles and other assorted upgrades, while designated 'Kill Zones' add to the fun as you attempt to smash rivals into the spiked walls of the track for quick kills while the barmy announcer screams: "Take his life!"

» ATARI 400/800



» NECROMANCER

■ SYSTEM: ATARI 400/800 (ALSO ON C64)
■ DEVELOPER: SYNAPSE SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1982

■ **Synapse was one** of the most innovative of the early 8-bit developers in the US, and this unique and frenetic offering from Bill Williams, once called "the Stanley Kubrick of game design", is an example why. The aim is to defeat the evil wizard of the title, firstly by building an army of tree golems by planting seeds while fending off enemies with your wisp-like cursor. Next you progress to the vaults and use your tree army to destroy enemy spiders by planting them above their lairs, as you descend into the depths by activating ladders. Crack this and the final showdown awaits. A very left field, but fascinating, game.

» ATARI 7800



» DESERT FALCON

■ SYSTEM: ATARI 7800 (ALSO ON ATARI 2600/400/800)
■ DEVELOPER: ATARI CORPORATION ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **This curious isometric** shooter is a strange but pleasing mix of blasting action and memory puzzler, as you guide a charmingly animated raptor over a distinctly Egyptian-themed landscape, battling nasties and grabbing treasure. In a departure from most *Zaxxon*-style games, the main character can hop along the ground to pick up collectables, the most interesting being a series of different hieroglyphs. Picking up three of these will grant a special power depending on the combination obtained, leading to an interesting extra level of experimentation in discovering which sequences are most beneficial.

» [Sharp X68000] Destroying the boss's core will yield a treasure trove of bonuses.



» [Sharp X68000] The detailed graphics genuinely were arcade-quality for the time.





» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The Sharp X68000 was created by the Sharp Corporation and released only in Japan.
- The very first version was released in 1987 and included a 10MHz Motorola 68000 processor.
- It was used by Capcom as a CPS board development machine…
- …which meant it had some truly stunning Capcom conversions.

into gold spheres, which boost your ship's power temporarily. These vary in effect, sometimes granting meaty V-shaped lasers, or causing your multiples to go haywire and circle your ship defensively. Rarer consequences include effects like slowing down enemies and bullets, or making your ship invincible for a short time. As the bad guys come in thick and fast, especially on later levels, these effects are very welcome. The stages themselves are for the most part well-designed and varied – standouts include a jungle infested with bullet-spewing vegetation, a crumbling alien ruin that collapses as you shoot your way through it, a landscape teeming with dangerous waterfalls, and an homage to the solar supernova level in *Salamander*. It's definitely worth playing on after the credits roll to see all of the extra levels that Konami tacked on to the game.

It's worth mentioning that *Nemesis '90* is a tough game, even by the standards of the series, with a difficulty curve that pretty much becomes a plateau right from the start. But due to the X68000's Japan-only market base, it's a shame that this remains one of a number of excellent *Gradius* titles to never make it to the West – alongside the PlayStation's remarkable *Gradius Gaiden* – as it's a beautifully crafted game that any shooter fan would probably give their trigger finger and both opposable thumbs to play.

Alternatively, we'd point towards *Gradius V* (PS2) as one of the series' finest moments. A *Gradius* game developed by Treasure? Yes, it's as good as it sounds.



» [Sharp X68000] Don't expect the game to go easy on you, because it's hard as nails.

» APPLE IIE



» AIRHEART

■ SYSTEM: APPLE IIE
■ DEVELOPER: BRØDERBUND ■ YEAR: 1986

■ ***Choplifter* creator Dan Gorlin** followed up his popular arcade-style shooter with this arguably more intriguing game, which took advantage of the Apple IIe's rarely used double hi-resolution mode. The results are an impressive and colourful 3D shooter-cum-adventure in which you control a hovering seacraft in a quest to rescue a missing child while battling enemies from air and sea. As with *Choplifter*, the in-game physics of *Airheart* create an extra level of immersion for players. Gorlin later remade the game for the Amiga and Atari ST in the form of *Typhoon Thompson In Search For The Sea Child*.

» ATARI ST



» OIDS

■ SYSTEM: ATARI ST
■ DEVELOPER: FTL GAMES ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **This physics-based** shooter from *Dungeon Master* developer FTL plays like a cross between *Lunar Lander* and *Choplifter*. Piloting your ship across a number of perplexingly complicated planets, you're tasked with rescuing tiny men – the Oids of the game's title – from scattered enemy installations. Naturally the best way to free them from their prisons is to blow them to smithereens, land on a nearby flat surface, and wait for them to hop aboard. Then it's off to the mothership for tea and biccies before your next sortie of Oid-ing. A level creator allowing you to design your own planets tops off the package.

» C64



» DRELBS

■ SYSTEM: C64 (ALSO ON ATARI 400/800)
■ DEVELOPER: SYNAPSE SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1984

■ **Another hugely original** premise from Synapse, *Drelbs* is far more difficult to describe than it is to pick up and play. Is it a maze game or a puzzler? What exactly is a Drelb? Either way, it's a brilliant, utterly playable game, with a lead character that looks like an eyeball on legs flitting around the screen, flipping panels to form boxes, hopefully trapping enemies inside en route. All this while avoiding phantom faces, keeping an eye out for mysterious Drelb portals, collecting hearts and kissing girls. We reckon that designer Kelly Jones was definitely thinking outside the box when he came up with this one.



Craig Grannell trudges round the Retro Gamer back nine, handing out clubs to Dennis Koble and Lee Actor, and quizzing the pair about how they managed to get a hole-in-one with their very first golf videogame

PGA TOUR® GOLF

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** STERLING SILVER SOFTWARE
- » **PLATFORM:** PC, LATER CONVERTED TO MEGA DRIVE, AMIGA, GAME GEAR, MAC, MASTER SYSTEM, SNES
- » **RELEASED:** 1990 (PC)
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS

Some games are genre landmarks, but only the lucky few go on to spawn an industry-leading series. In the world of videogames, 1990 PC release *PGA Tour Golf* might have seemed another in a long line of digital recreations of the sport, but it ousted then-champ *Leader Board*, and the series spent years battling (and defeating) *Links*, eventually securing a lucrative tie-in with golfing superstar Tiger Woods.

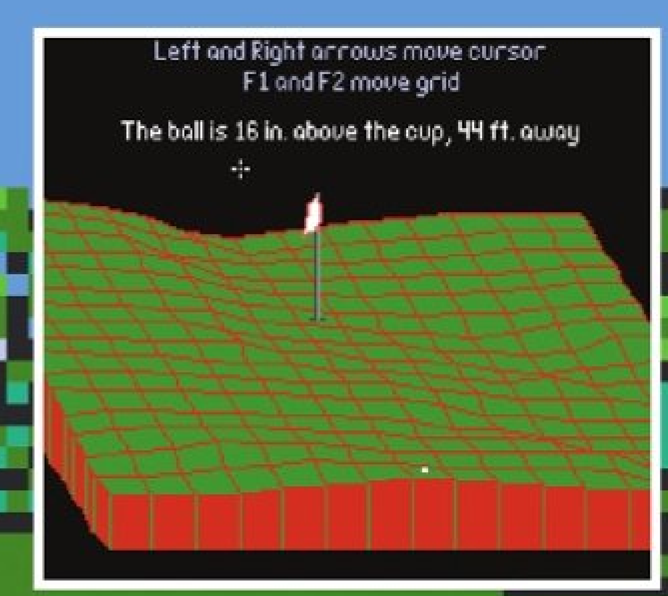
The original *PGA Tour Golf* was created by Dennis Koble and Lee Actor, who'd become friends while working for various gaming companies, creating many popular coin-op and home-console titles. But towards the end of the 1980s, Bally laid off many staff, including Lee, and Dennis was plotting his escape from EA, where he was unhappy as director of software.

"Rich Adam, a former Bally Sente and Atari alumni was a producer there, and he wanted a golf game to compete with *World Class Leader Board*, which dominated PC golf," remembers Dennis. "Rich urged Lee and I to form Sterling Silver Software to produce the game, with the challenge of creating something that allowed a player to feel as if they were a professional golfer on the PGA Tour, but didn't require them to have the skill to play at that level."

With Lee and Dennis both keen amateur golfers and veterans of arcade gaming, they were uniquely positioned to create a product unlike any that had existed up to that point.


»[DOS] *PGA Tour Golf* enables you to select the clubs you'd like to take on a tournament.











»[DOS] With PCs using mouse input, *PGA Tour Golf* makes most options available via menus.





»[DOS] Overhead maps are just a click away, and highlight the game's strategic approach regarding ball positioning.



»[DOS] Using the instant replay, you can watch disastrous shots again and again.

LEADERBOARD

	Par	Hole		Par	Hole
1. Andrew Magee	-5	8	13. David Frost	-1	4
2. Tommy Armour III	-3	11	14. Bruce Lietzke	-1	4
3. Howard Twitty	-2	8	15. Dan Pohl	-1	5
4. Robert Wrenn	-2	11	16. Ed Fiori	-1	6
5. Gene Sauers	-2	11	17. Bob Lohr	-1	8
6. Mike Donald	-2	12	18. Mark Wiebe	-1	9
7. Paul Azinger	-2	14	19. Roger Maltbie	-1	13
8. Larry Nelson	-2	14	20. Larry Rinker	-1	16
9. Rocco Mediate	-2	15	21. Jim Booros	-1	16
10. Mike Hulbert	-2	15	22. Retro Gamer	E	1
11. Joey Sindelar	-2	16	23. Duffy Waldorf	E	2
12. Lou Hinkle	-1	3	24. Billy Andrade	E	2

Dennis remembers most PC games back then were "about simulations and slow, complicated learning curves," eschewing the immediacy and intense fun of the arcades and home consoles. "Our focus was to take the fun of an arcade game, add the slightly greater depth of a home console game, and meld it into the PC game world."

Instead of drawing on existing games for inspiration, they were used to figure out what to avoid in *PGA Tour Golf*. Lee remembers many games "had the effect of destroying the illusion you were playing golf," offering slow rendering, frustrating play mechanisms and unrealistic ball paths. For Lee, controls were key: "One of my golden rules was if a player achieved suboptimal results, he should feel it was due to something he did, not something the game did to him. And so with *PGA Tour Golf*, the main design goal was that it shouldn't be hard to be pretty good, but it should be challenging to be extremely good." He says making controls feel right was always about trial and error and a good sense for tweaking interfaces; but Lee admits that at its core, *PGA Tour Golf*'s three-click swing – one to start, the second to set power, the third to draw or fade – wasn't wildly different from what was used in competing products: "But it worked and felt way better; you got more control, without it being easy, and it's one of those subtleties of interface design which requires design skills that, frankly, many programmers do not have."

Innovation was more apparent in putting, where *PGA Tour Golf* moved on from *Leader Board*'s basic sloping greens. "We were the first game with 3D greens and tried adding an overlaid grid, like *Links* did later, but there wasn't enough resolution for decent gameplay. So we decided to use a preview to show a highly exaggerated 3D representation," explains Lee. "What I liked about this was it mirrored the way real putting works – you read the green, decide on the line and stroke, then execute the shot. In real golf, you don't read the green as you putt – you're focused only on the area right around the ball."

"Obviously, only doing real physics was out of the question… they are almost entirely faked"

Tight controls were only part of the equation – for the virtual golf to feel right, the physics had to be spot-on. "This is what separated the men from the boys when designing and programming for platforms with extremely limited hardware capabilities," argues Lee. "Fixed-point maths only… Avoid multiple operations if at all possible… Never even consider using a divide! Obviously, only doing real physics was completely out of the question, so the physics in *PGA Tour Golf* are almost entirely faked. I found ways of dividing up the problem, substituting different processes, and simplifying the calculations that had no physical basis, but gave a very realistic and believable result in the game." However, Dennis thinks the game wasn't entirely divorced from the real world: "The physics in the game were based on reality as much as possible – it's just the physical models were very simple by today's standards. The trick was to always ensure the player never felt the computer had cheated them or misread their intentions."

To help players get into the game, the value of the PGA Tour licence increasingly became apparent – ironic, given that EA originally wanted

PGA TOUR GOLF

»[DOS] A bug became a feature: "We were working on the camera code and the camera started to fly around the course, so we built that into the game and gave you a flyover preview."



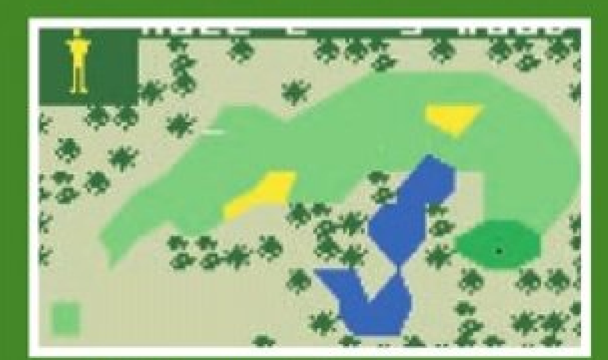




RETRO GOLFING: A PUTTED HISTORY



Computer Golf! (Odyssey², 1978)
■ Horrible top-down golf with clunky controls. The 'realistic nine-hole' course lacks sand traps and water (Atari's similar 1980 *Golf* adds them), but has trees dwarfed by your giant golfer.



PGA Golf (Intellivision, 1980)
■ Retaining a top-down view, Mattel's game ramps up the realism: you get nine clubs that behave as they should (i.e. no using a wood in a sand trap), and you can draw or fade. It's also an early licensee.



Leader Board (C64 and others, 1986)
■ Not the first 3D golf game, but the first to nail it. Marrying intuitive controls with challenging holes, even the original's surreal 'fairway and water' courses weren't a drawback.

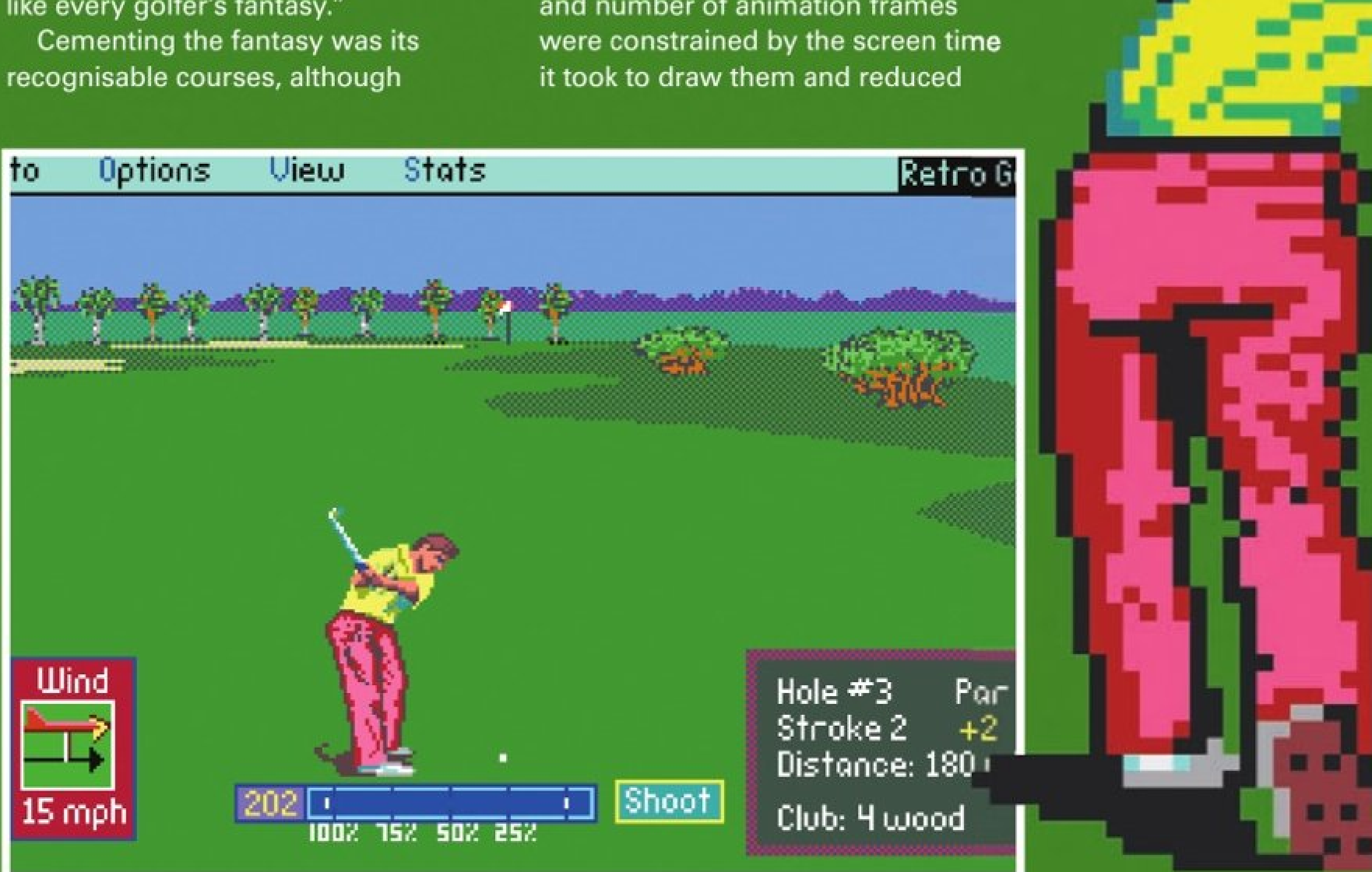


Golf (Game Boy, 1989)
■ Although originally a 1984 NES release, 1989's *Game Boy Golf* propelled the genre into the mainstream. The digital sport was no longer the preserve of golfing fans, but something everyone could enjoy.

to licence the Jack Nicklaus name, but lost out to Accolade, and so had to settle for what was perceived as the 'second best' licence. "It gave us name recognition, and it meant we could do a tournament-style game, where you played against real pros," explains Lee. "One of our main ideas was that the player should feel like a pro and go through a similar thinking process that pro golfers go through on the course – and we heard from several pros who played the game that we were successful in achieving that." Dennis attests to this, suggesting that previous games had been more about "learning the game of golf," but *PGA Tour Golf* assumed you knew the basics: "The game was about making decisions not based on whether you could hit a shot, but rather on the strategy of playing a shot to a certain place for a certain position." However, the concept stopped short of realism, entirely on purpose: "Our focus was not on realistic golf – we could already play bad golf in real life! We wanted to be able to play a superior game of golf, like every golfer's fantasy."

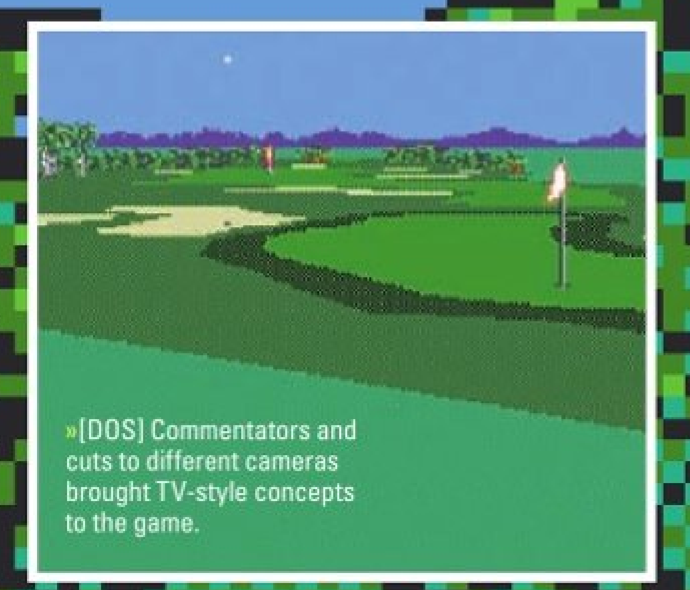
Cementing the fantasy was its recognisable courses, although Dennis notes this was before golf courses recognised the potential for licensing data: "I developed a method to input course data into the PC. We'd trace a course's outlines and then tape it to the screen. I'd then use a graphics package I'd created to plot a series of points that turned the course into basic polygonal shapes. There was no height information, apart from on the greens, where we created an underlying grid and assigned a height to each intersection." The resulting representations were crude, but good enough – something mirrored by the game's graphics. "They were very much determined by the nature of the hardware. We determined early on that the golfer graphics would be essentially 2D against a 3D background of the course. There was not enough horsepower in those days to handle a 3D golfer. In fact, it was hard to even animate a 2D golfer as the PC wasn't really set up for those sorts of graphics."

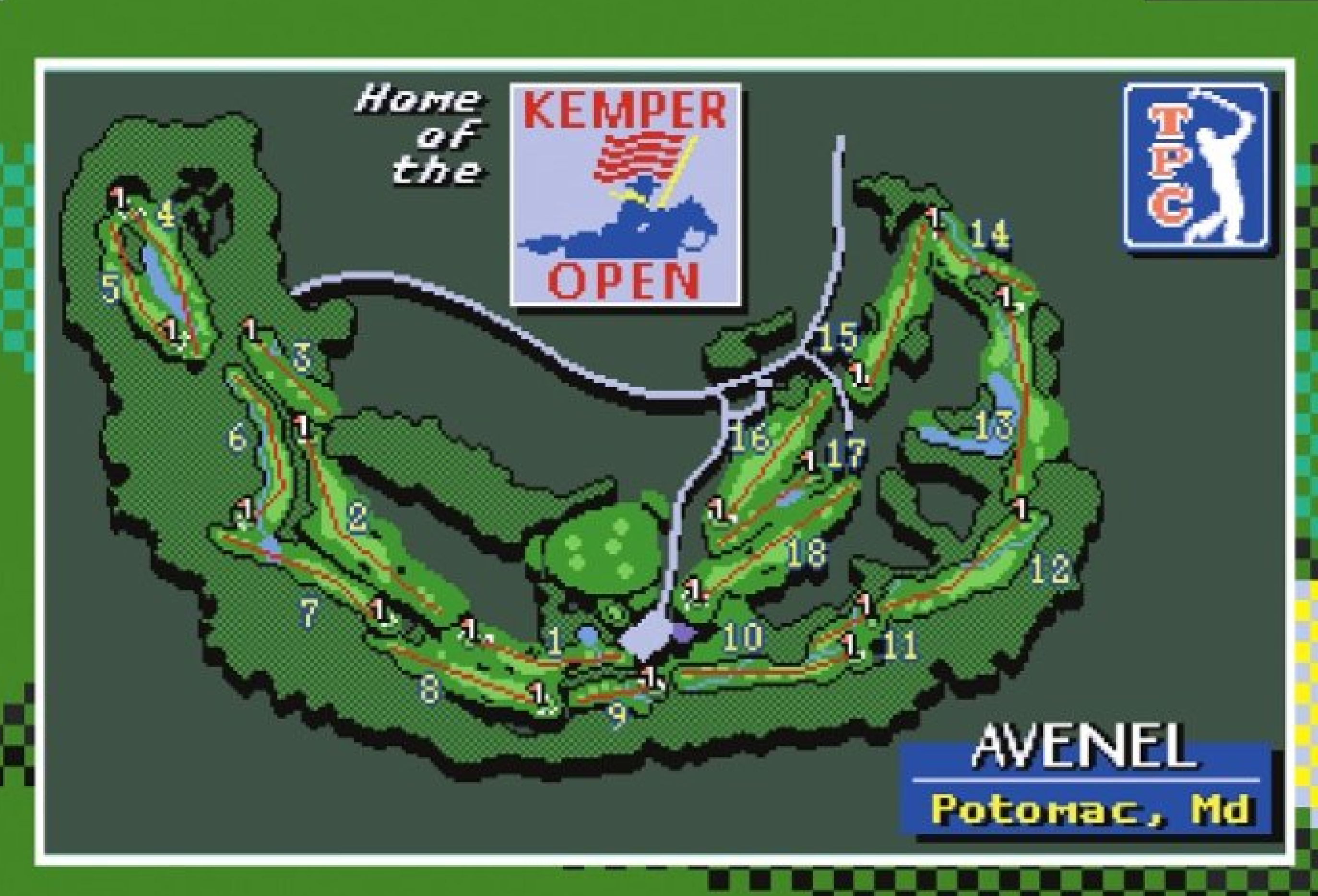
Compromises were evident elsewhere. The size of the golfer and number of animation frames were constrained by the screen time it took to draw them and reduced accordingly. And initial ideas to make the game controls work in real time were scrapped when the duo discovered that the technology wasn't up to their expectations. "We did at one point want the swing-and-hit to be in real time, like the golf games of today, but the PC didn't have enough horsepower at the time," says Dennis. "So that's really where the concept of the swing meter evolved from – the ball and golfer animations were then played out subsequently after all the computation and heavy lifting had been done." And while one of the original visual hooks had been a "concept based around a PGA Tour event being televised," these aspects were also toned down. So while you do get a camera cutting as the ball



> “We always treated the game industry as a business, and as a result it treated us very well”




»[DOS] Commentators and cuts to different cameras brought TV-style concepts to the game.




»[Mega Drive] Dennis and Lee also created the Mega Drive version, and believed it superior to the PC original.

flies over the course, you don't get "television towers, offering a variety of shot viewpoints, because that was too impractical to implement."

On release, *PGA Tour Golf* was critically acclaimed, and Lee recalls that "once EA realised what it had and got behind it, we knew the game would be a success". Dennis remembers the first real indicator of this was IBM bundling the game with the PCjr: "IBM bought 250,000 copies, and we then knew the game would be a commercial hit. Also, the reviews were positive and the game's inclusion in various TV shows suggested it would be a long-term success." This proved accurate, since the game was swiftly converted to other platforms, and sequels were ordered. "The Mega Drive/Genesis version came about because Sega was interested in launching its platform with quality games and agreed to give *PGA Tour Golf* a huge push," recalls Dennis, adding that the game ended up being more advanced than the PC version, due to Sega's console "having more powerful graphics and being geared towards gaming". As for the sequels, Lee remembers: "The main aim was mundane – build the franchise and generate more income. Unlike some developers, we always treated the game industry as a business, and as a result it treated us very well. Not that we didn't enjoy what we were doing a great deal!"

All good things must come to an end, though, and EA eventually brought development in-house. "The series became too popular and EA felt it was paying us too much," says Dennis, adding that Lee's business skills had led to products being self-amortising, rather than fewer royalties being generated by a less-popular port holding the others back. He says while EA's decision to "eliminate Sterling Silver Software from the equation" was initially troublesome, a software group acquired by EA was eventually able to duplicate the game. "So we were shut out of the series, because EA owned the licence, and although there was legal wrangling, EA had the money and resources to hire high-powered legal staff, so we had no choice but to acquiesce."

Both Lee and Dennis have long since retired from the industry, and are now immersed in music – Lee is an award-winning orchestral composer (see leeactor.com) and Dennis is what he jokingly refers to as "an as-yet-unrecognised trance music producer" (see looperman.com/profile.php?mod=tracks&mid=226894 or 'Koble' on iTunes). But the *PGA Tour Golf* series thrives under the *Tiger Woods* licence, so what do the series's creators think of its longevity and newest entries? "I'm proud of setting the standard for the golf game genre, and while I'm not familiar with the latest version of *PGA Tour*, I'm sure it looks a thousand times better than ours… But I'd be willing to bet our game, crude though it may be, is ultimately more fun to play," suggests Lee. Dennis agrees: "Technologically, the newer games are light years ahead of ours, but I think the inherent simplicity of the original series is better than the current incarnation of 'simulation' in *Tiger Woods* – and all modern sports games. They lack that mantra of 'simple to learn, difficult to master' that all the Atari early alumni fervently believed in and practised. A new wave of games on iOS, like *Angry Birds*, emulates that old philosophy, so perhaps that old mantra still has some life left in it!"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

HARD DRIVIN' (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1990

PIT FIGHTER
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1991

PGA TOUR II
SYSTEM: PC, MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992



SWING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING

ALTHOUGH THE BULK of *PGA Tour Golf* was down to Dennis and Lee, the graphics were the work of Wilfredo 'Willie' Aguilar. "We weren't really graphic designers, and so we had to 'hire' out the art with part of our advances from EA," recalls Dennis. "We used Willie, who we knew from our Bally Sente days, and he agreed to do the art for a small percentage of the potential royalties from the first game." It turned out to be one of the best deals Dennis made. "We ended up paying him royalty amounts to the tune of several thousand dollars years later!" However, the pair considered this a good investment, since it gave *PGA* an edge over the competition from a visual standpoint. "We started with a video of a golf swing and the artist went from there," says Lee. "We paid attention to detail and used programming tricks to make the swing look right for different kinds of strokes."

» YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FORGOTTEN GAME SYSTEMS

OBSCURA MACHINA

#6 Fairchild Channel F



During the mid-Seventies, at the height of the home *Pong* craze, a semiconductor manufacturer launched an assault on the young consumer videogames industry. This company had the capability to run all aspects of the console's creative process – design, fabrication and manufacturing. Unfortunately, the main problem that plagued other consoles sure to grace these pages in future was present here as well. Nullifying any head start over Atari, the lesson is an often hard-learned one: if you don't have hot titles and people who know how to design the games people want to play, your console is not going to sell. That manufacturer was Fairchild Semiconductor under Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corporation, and its console was the Fairchild Video Entertainment System (VES) – also known as the Channel F.**

The VES's story starts when Fairchild had hired engineer Jerry Lawson, an acquaintance of Atari notable Al Alcorn, as a freelance engineer for reaching out to its customers in the field. Caught up in some of the fever after having seen *Computer Space* and then *Pong* during their introductions, he decided to build his own arcade machine. Only unlike the discrete technology games that Atari was putting out, Jerry decided to build his around a microprocessor. Using Fairchild's new F8 chipset, he was able to build what was arguably the first microprocessor-based videogame. Called *Demolition Derby*, it was designed in Jerry's garage – a traditional startup location for engineers of the time. Using an actual CPU allowed Jerry to program the game rather than hardwire it, but most importantly it would also give him and ultimately Fairchild a head start in the consumer arena. Jerry had put his arcade game to test at a location, and management at Fairchild found out about it. Upset at first with an employee doing a project like this on the side, the company's tune quickly changed when it realised that it could have Jerry take over from a contract with an outside firm to design a videogame that was going sour. Soon Jerry was heading the new videogame division, and with a sizable discretionary budget he began hiring new personnel to aid in reaching his vision: a fully programmable home videogame system based on the Fairchild F8.

Because it was going to be a consumer device, Jerry knew it was paramount to have the games reside in removable cartridges. Testing on this alone was extravagant for the time because removable memory devices hadn't been done before, and the Federal Communications Commission wanted to make sure things didn't spark, surge or even melt. Consequently, every single new cartridge had to be submitted for testing, and in the end each cartridge and even the console itself had to be encased internally within a heavy metal shield to cut down on possible interference – something that Atari would also have to do with its first console.

JUST THE FACTS

Jerry and company used the Channel F to pioneer the use of remote games distribution, allowing local cable subscribers to download games to their specially connected Channel F consoles, all in the mid-Seventies.

The Channel F was featured in an interactively broadcast videogame in 1978. Called *TV POWWW*, the player would tune in to a broadcasted Channel F game on the television and call in to a special studio telephone number. As the game was always a shooter, one voice command was spoken into the phone: "POW!" when they wanted to make their player shoot.

The original Channel F's controllers were hardwired to the console. The Channel F System II changed this to detachable controllers using standard DB9 connectors like the Atari 2600's.

Only the initial launch cartridges had the snazzy artwork. Later carts in the series and even later runs of the launch titles dropped the art for cost-reduction purposes. They instead added the Channel F name and logo and included game instructions directly printed on the label.

Like *Pong* consoles of the time, the Channel F's sound is through a built-in speaker instead of the television.

Zircon ported Channel F goodness to the Atari 2600, only in this case it was the controller. Released as the Video Command Controller, the twisting capabilities were cut out.

The honour of the very first Easter egg in a home videogame doesn't belong to Atari's *Adventure*: two earlier cartridges for the Channel F actually include Easter eggs. These include the system's store demo cart (1977), and *Video Whizball* (Videocart-20, released 1978).

Europe saw licensed releases of the Fairchild Channel F System II, including the Saba Videoplay, ITT Telemech Video Processor, Nordmende Teleplay, Luxor Video Entertainment System, Dumont Videoplay, Barco Challenger, and the UK's own Adman Grandstand.

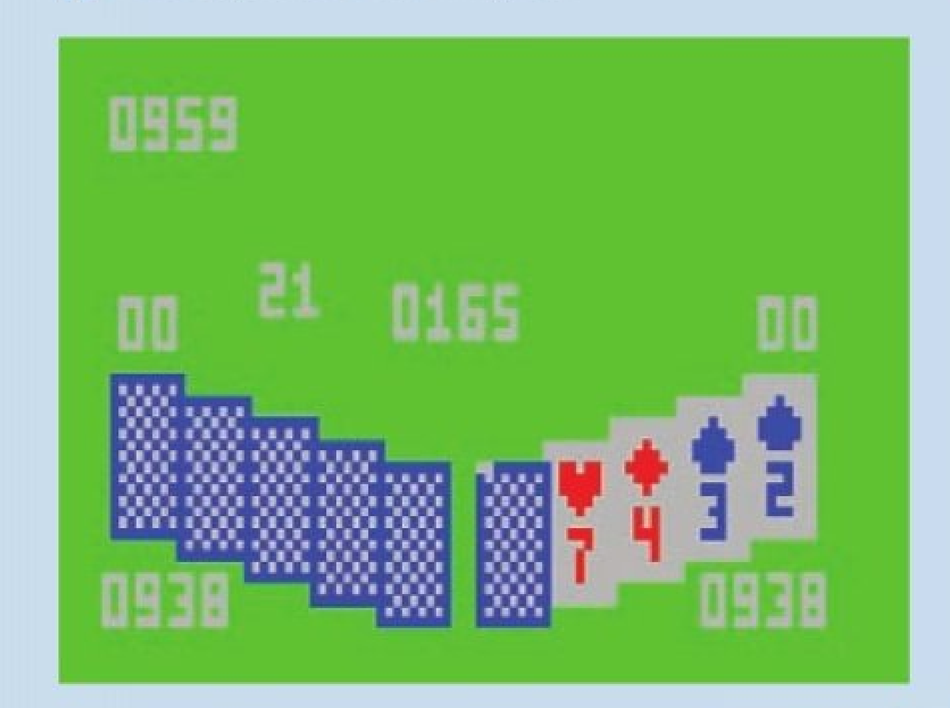


While Europe was getting comfortable with the likes of the 1292 Advanced Programmable Video System, Americans had the Fairchild Channel F. Marty Goldberg gives you the scoop

PERFECT THREE

BLACKJACK

A launch title, it simply made the system look promising in 1976. With standards of detail and presentation that you'd expect from the later Intellivision, it makes Atari's release several years later look uninspired.



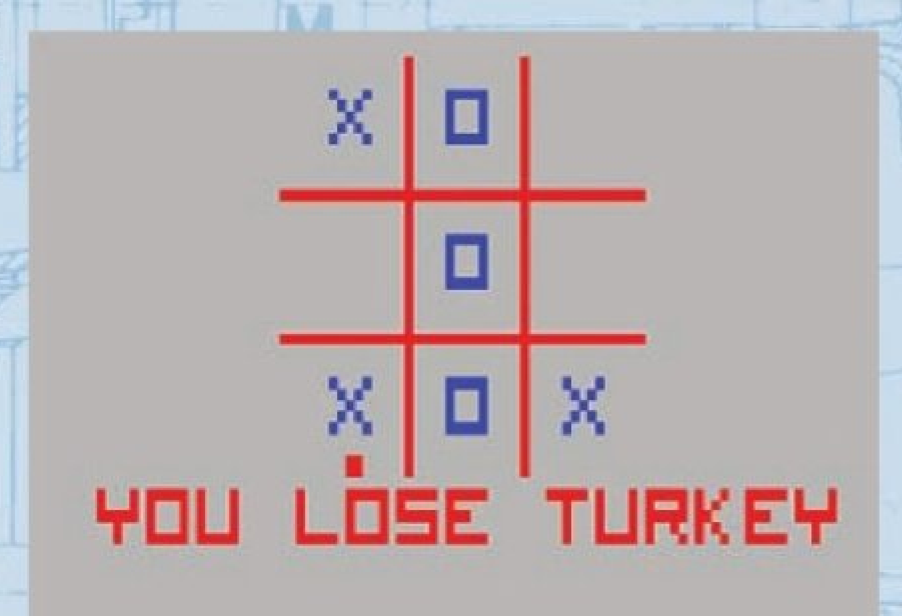
PAC-MAN

A commercially released homebrew by Channel F fan Fredric Blåholtz, this actually manages to show off the potential of the system to handle the popular games of the period. Looks and plays better than the 2600's version.



TIC-TAC-TOE

It's included in the console and it's certainly not going to win any awards for pushing graphics forward, but not many games from this era have the confidence to taunt you when you lose. You lose, turkey!









» The Channel F's controllers are a unique approach, and the form factor has returned to favour in the Wii Remote and PlayStation Move.



» The wonderful Seventies pop art on the original cartridge labels makes them unique and adds a measure of collectability to them.

The Channel F's controllers that Jerry designed were also unique in that they are eight-way digital controllers in the shape of a stick with no fire buttons. You manipulate the controller by gesturing in any of the eight directions of moving forward or back, right or left, twisting right or left, and pulling up or pushing down. The last motion is often used for firing within games.

With the prototype a success with the Fairchild brass, Jerry's industrial design engineer Nicholas F Talesfore began work on the casing of the console and cartridges. He came up with a design factor ubiquitous with Seventies entertainment centre decorum: faux wood grain and smoked plastic. Combined with garish bright yellow cartridges the size of 8-track tapes called Videocarts, they believed it would fit in with anybody's rec room veneer. Game programs on the console are selected via a similar method to tracks on an 8-track player: by selecting one of four large buttons. The labels on the cartridges, designed by local artist Tom Kamifuji, feature Seventies-style pop art influenced by Peter Max. Two of the period's standard-issue games are built in to the system: *Tennis* and *Hockey*.

Fairchild's console was debuted at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago in the summer of 1976, sending a clear message that the new videogame industry had just changed again. Reviews were positive for the system, and many began questioning the relevance of the plethora of new *Pong* consoles entering the market at the time. However, one thing kept holding Fairchild's console back as the industry responded in kind with competitors: the games. Compared to Atari's games on its new Video Computer System the following year, which were mostly ports of its own coin-op games, the value and fun play just weren't there. Only 21 games were released by Fairchild before electronics company Zircon bought up the remaining stock, including the briefly released cost-reduced Channel F System II. Zircon re-released the System II to the early Eighties videogame market along with five new cartridges, but the system didn't fare well and Jerry's legacy faded into obscurity.

But is this the VES or Channel F? Popular myth has it that the name was changed with the release of Atari's VCS (later 2600) in 1977, but that's not the case. The name changed to Channel F just before launch. Consequently, the label on the console's storage cover was never changed and the launch cartridges also state simply 'Fairchild' on them, while the outside packaging was labelled 'Channel F'.

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAPASCHIPS

S.H

If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

T.L.L. TORNADO LOW LEVEL

INFO

- **SYSTEM:** SPECTRUM
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **PUBLISHER:** VORTEX SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** COSTA PANAYI



» [Spectrum] When you successfully destroy your targets, the game just plonks them somewhere more annoying on the map. It's actually more fun than it sounds.

Few games in history have had such a fuss made about how realistic their shadowcasting effects are, but in 1984 that is exactly what many reviewers were commenting on after playing *T.L.L.*, Costa Panayi's superb follow-up to *Android 2*. Well, that and how brilliant the game was.

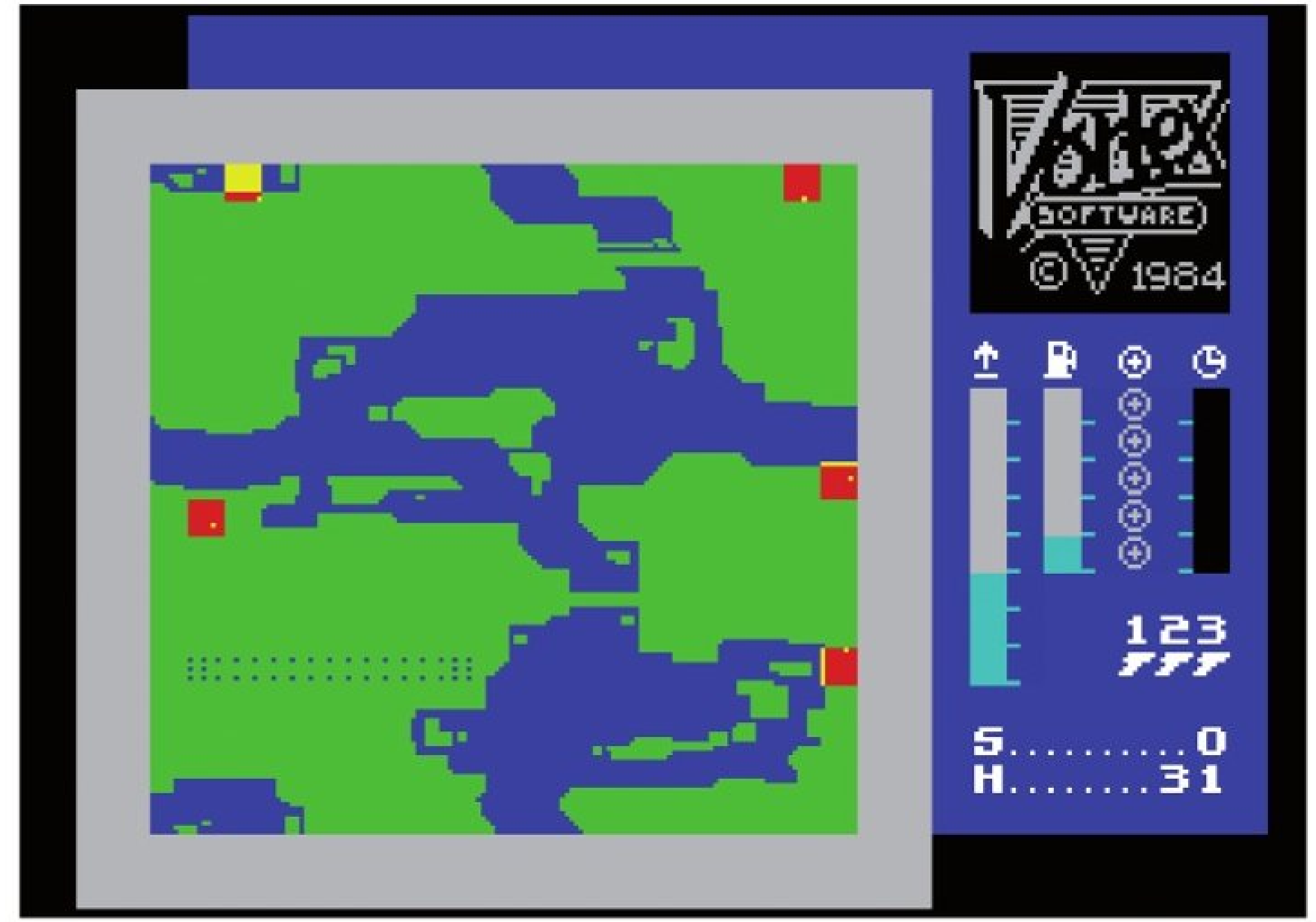
To be fair, the shadow in the game was rather good, even if it didn't increase and decrease in size as your plane decreased and increased in altitude. Piloting a low-flying fighter plane across a colourful city and destroying a series of ground targets by rubbing them with the underside of your aircraft, the shadow cast by your iron eagle would move realistically across the city rooftops and generally prove a handy wingman to help you to navigate the game's massive map and many obstacles.

Using the same faux-3D engine as *Android 2*, which placed the perspective at a skewed bird's-eye view – as if the bird had a permanent crook-neck that forced it to view the universe at a 45-degree angle – *T.L.L.* blew the socks off many Spectrum owners back in the day thanks to its colourful 3D graphics and addictive gameplay. The game succeeds in straddling both the flight simulator – with players having to concern themselves with taking off, the altitude of the plane and, of course, landing and refuelling – and the action arcade game, with the core gameplay seeing you having to locate and destroy those aforementioned ground targets, which are scattered randomly around the game's wonderfully detailed and sizable map.

Before take-off, players are debriefed and given a chance to take a cursory glance at the map, which highlights exactly where these targets are situated. After taking a mental snapshot, it's then time to take then to the sky, where you'll be relying on combination of radar, shadows and deft flying to successfully manoeuvre around the game's built-up city and tickle your targets.

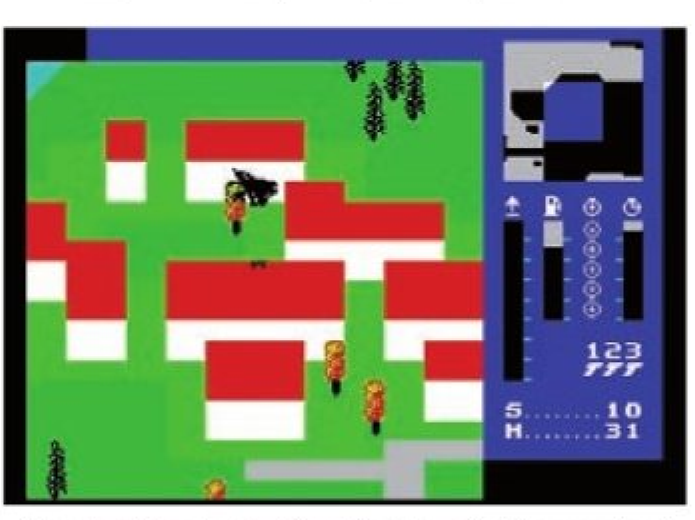
While a flight game that frequently asks you to fly at ground level might seem a little strange, the low-level flying is fundamental to the gameplay, as it cleverly forces you to frequently stick your neck out to progress. At the highest altitude there's little in the way of obstructions to be mindful of. However, the closer you get to ground zero there more there is to concern yourself with; electricity pylons, buildings and even trees are out to stop out. And there's no time to dawdle and take your time, either – not only is there a strict time limit in which to successfully complete your mission, but your plane is also slowly burning off fuel. However, in this instance you can fill up with petrol again, but landing to do so isn't easy, as you must line up your plane up with the centre of the runaway – though, at the very least, you do get another peek of the map while you wait.

While we wouldn't consider the game an out-and-out classic, *T.L.L.* still gets a lot of play here in the office. And considering it sells for peanuts, it's a game you should definitely consider the next time you find yourself with a few pounds burning a hole in your pockets.

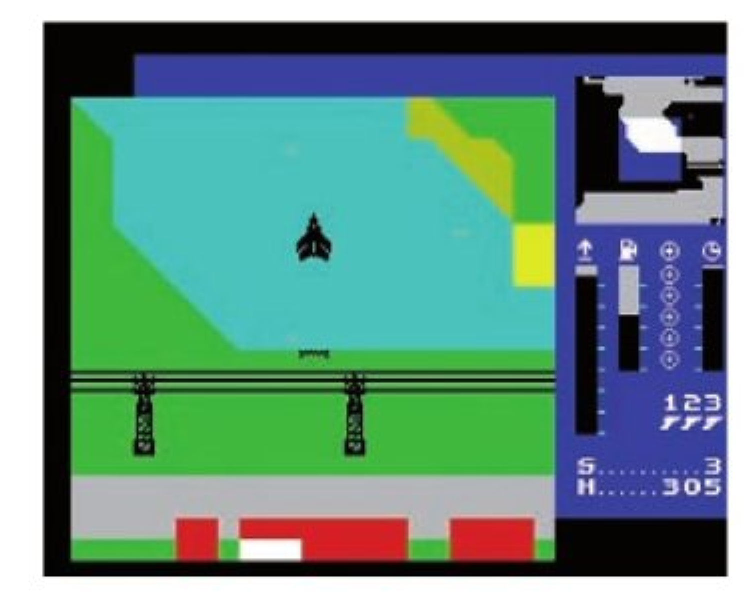


» [Spectrum] *T.L.L.* sure is colourful – like *Sim City* married *Raid Over Moscow*, they had a child and it was brought up by Andy Warhol.





» [Spectrum] Pressing the take-off button while airborne will pull back the plane's wings and make it move faster.





GRAZING

SADDLES

THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF ROAD RASH

This month **Stuart Hunt** dons a crash helmet and charges his trusty Taser to take a look back at the blood and tyre marks left by the Road Rash series, one of the most technically impressive racing series to emerge from the 16-bit era, and goes mano a mano with Mega Drive series producer Randy Breen



Riding a motorcycle can be a dangerous pursuit. The closest thing a human can come to sitting on a rocket and lighting the fuse without going into space, it's no surprise that to ride one safely and sensibly you have to dress like you're about to be shot out of a cannon. If you're a responsible rider, though, and take the relevant safety precautions – such as always wearing a crash helmet, and never, ever attempting to ride one wearing flip-flops – motorcyclists will tell you that there is simply no thrill quite like it. Translating that thrill into videogames, however, has always been the challenge sitting before game developers. The danger and inherent buzz that comes from riding a motorcycle in the real world is palpable and omnipresent, and impossible for videogames to re-create. Understanding this, it was a clever strategy by EA in the early Nineties to look to inject a sense of exhilaration by another means.

ROAD RASH ON MULHOLLAND DRIVE

Though many talented people were involved in making *Road Rash* the classic game that it was, there were really two men integral in getting it made. The first man was Randy Breen. Game designer and producer of the *Road Rash* series for the Mega Drive, Randy, a biking enthusiast, joined EA right at the start, in 1986, at a time when the company's payroll was fewer than 100 people.

"In the early days, EA was a publisher managing external developers creating original titles. Most of these were produced for PCs like the Commodore 64, Apple IIc and the IBM PC," recalls Randy. "EA was slow to migrate to the Nintendo Famicom largely because of the Atari console bust in the mid-Eighties; by the late Eighties EA had started to build some internal development capacity. We began some in-house R&D on the Famicom to engineer a road effect for a driving game. The decision was made to shift focus and make a big push on the Sega Genesis with its introduction to the US market. Engineering on the road effect was then moved to the Genesis."

The person responsible for that road effect, and the second key player in this story, was Carl Mey. Working as technical director for EA in 1989, one of Carl's first projects was to create a banked road effect for a brand new NES racing title. However, he soon realised that while the console

GRAZING SADDLES





"I WAS BIG INTO MOTORCYCLES AND THOUGHT THEY COULD ADD MORE ENTERTAINMENT VALUE THAN CARS"

could create an impressive road-scaling effect, banking would be stretching its capabilities a little too far. His efforts were not wasted, though, as it was this effect that was adapted to the more-powerful Genesis and helped to generate the impressive road effect in *Road Rash*.

In an interview with our sister magazine **games™** discussing the making of the first game, Carl, who also worked on the Mega Drive hit *Desert Strike*, explained in detail about how the effect worked and how the technology behind the *Road Rash* series started to take shape: "I created a super-fast scaling algorithm that allowed several scaled sprite images in addition to the road effect. My effect was exactly like Mode 7, except there was no rotating around the Z-axis. While optimising the code I figured out that the interrupts I used to set scale per scan line were using about 60 per cent of the CPU, and, at the time, Edwin Reich was working on a true 3D version of *Blockout* for the Mega Drive, so we adapted the technology for *Road Rash*. We were able to render all the detail for the road, including the dashed lines. It was all smoke and mirrors but it was actual 3D rendering."

Randy produced and assisted on a number of driving games before *Road Rash*, including *Ferrari Formula One* and the acclaimed PC and Amiga game *Indianapolis 500: The Simulation* – a game on which he worked as assistant producer and that gave him the initial spark to bring a motorcycle racing game to the Mega Drive.

Developed by the now-defunct developer Papyrus Design Group, and designed by studio founders David Kaemmer and Omar Khudari, *Indianapolis 500* is widely regarded as being one of the first true arcade racing simulators to appear on home computers. A novel departure from arcade racing titles of the time, the game offered players the chance to compete in a faithful representation of the 500-mile Indianapolis 500 race, and allowed players to tweak the settings of their vehicles, test their setups in practice races, and even race a full 200 laps around an impressive virtual version of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

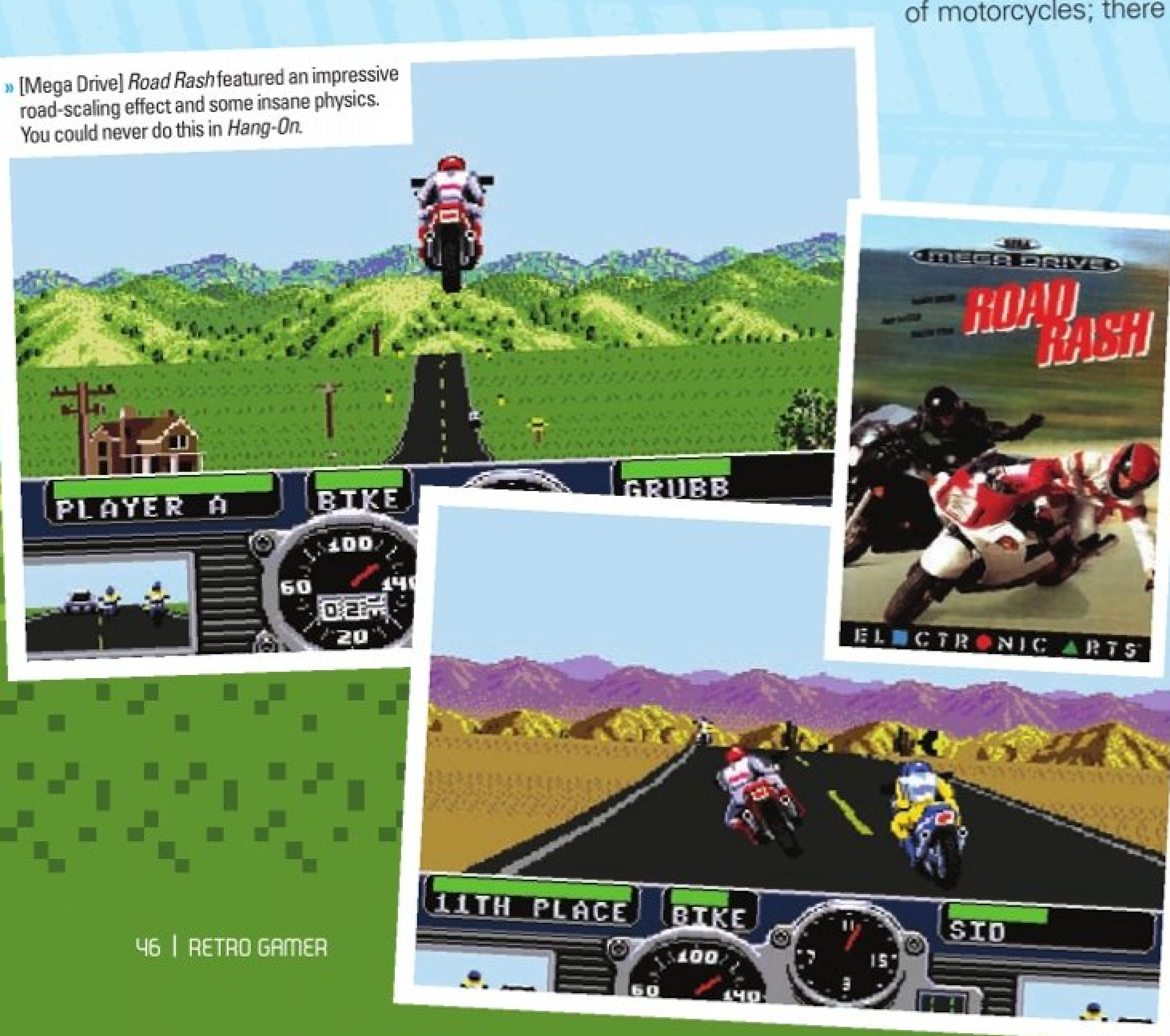
"*Indy 500* by Papyrus was truly a great game and ahead of its time, but it was incredibly difficult to play," says Randy. "Racing takes a lot of discipline and focus. I felt there was opportunity to make driving games more fun and reach a wider audience. I was big into motorcycles and thought they could add more entertainment value with characters you could see rather than with cars only visible from the rear or a view from inside the cockpit that occupied most of the screen."

Randy put forward his idea to his bosses, but it was met by some resistance, as the thinking was that cars were more popular than bikes. But there was more behind his desire to do a motorcycle racing game than simply his own love of motorcycles; there was a technical reason too.

"There was a sprite limitation on the Genesis. More than seven sprites on a line and the sprites would start flickering and disappear randomly. A car on screen at reasonable size could take three or four; a bike could be shown with one or two, so we could effectively get more action on screen with motorcycles," Randy continues. "I took inspiration from my passion for bikes and experiences in the thriving sport bike culture in the hills and back roads around San Francisco, video of shoving and kicking during tight racing in MotoGP, biker gang action in *Akira* and the bike pump scene from *Breaking Away*. I pitched a concept entitled *Road Rash On Mulholland Drive*. It was ambitious given the capability of the console but we were able to include much of the original concept."

Following that colourful pitch, *Road Rash* was eventually given the go-ahead, with Randy leading the internal team that worked on the game. After a year of development, the pressure was on for the team to showcase a demo of the game. Randy remembers the moment well.

"Our first demo didn't go well," he says. "EA was showcasing Genesis products and demonstrating them well before launch. We struggled to maintain a reasonable frame rate and the animations weren't effective. There was



» [Mega Drive] *Road Rash* featured an impressive road-scaling effect and some insane physics. You could never do this in *Hang-On*.



CONVERSION SCRAPERS

Your guide to every conversion of Road Rash

AMIGA

■ A very decent conversion that actually looks crisper than the original, although it isn't quite as smooth. There is little separating these conversions, to be honest. The Amiga version has loading times, joystick controls, two fewer fire buttons, and it doesn't sound as crisp. That's probably about it.



GAME BOY

■ It would be ambitious to try to cram any 3D racing game onto the Game Boy, let alone one with combat elements. Somehow, though, the handheld manages to do a competent job here. Certain elements are understandably lost in the port, though: you're restricted to punching and can't purchase new bikes.



GAME BOY COLOR

■ Despite the name, the Game Boy Color version of *Road Rash* was actually a conversion of *Road Rash II*, and a decent one at that. While the racing is a wee bit sluggish, we can't fault the graphics, which were done by Stoo Cambridge. This version also included kicks, weapons, the bike shop and a two-player link-up mode.



MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR

■ Considering that the original was said to be pushing the technical limits of the Mega Drive, that Probe Software managed to squeeze the entire game onto the Master System was an incredible feat. A fantastic conversion that isn't as smooth or quick, nor does it sound as good, but it impresses in every other area.



scepticism that we could pull it off, but over the next few months Dan Geisler and Walt Stein [*Road Rash*'s co-designers] managed to improve the performance and Connie Braat did a great job of getting the animation right. Arthur Koch and Matt Sarconi, among others, were able to strike a great balance between realism and the impressionism required by the platform."

Set from a third-person viewpoint, *Road Rash* saw players take part in an illegal road tournament divided between five races, all taking place on roads based on California State Routes, including Sierra Nevada, Palm Desert and Redwood Forest. As players progressed through the game, rather than new tracks being added to the game, existing ones would get progressively longer, while the competition got faster and obstacles more numerous.

As well as its implementation of combat, there were a number of other aspects that made *Road Rash* a great racing game. Its impressive pseudo-3D landscape was lavishly dressed with realistic scenery and interactive objects. Players not only had to be wary of other riders, but also the local wildlife, oncoming traffic, roadside fixtures and even police officers, who pursued racers on patrol bikes, beat them with nightsticks and busted them if caught.

There were even a number of simulator-style touches in the game. Its HUD featured wing mirrors to offer a full 360-degree view of rival racers, and when players did come off their saddles they kept full control over their biker and had to direct him back to his smoking high-performance wreck.

EA injected a real sense of personality into the game too. Rival racers were given distinct characters and delivered between-race banter to create an immersive racing world in which players really felt like wet-eared rookies trying to climb its ranks. And players could use money earned from races to purchase superior performance bikes or fix their old battered ones. Speaking of the bikes, because of the violence in the game, EA was unable to secure official licences from manufacturers and so *Road Rash*'s garage instead comprised soundalike bikes such as the Panda, Shuriken and Kamikaze – Honda, Suzuki and Kawasaki, respectively – and the ultimate prize for any rasher, the powerful Diablo 1000, which was based on a Ducati. From the realistic physics that saw bikes get satisfyingly launched high into the air, to the game's signs that could actually be used to determine the next turn of the road, *Road Rash* was full of immersive little touches.

Road Rash took the team about 21 months to develop, and it was released in the spring of 1991. Following its unsuccessful first unveiling a year into development, the early kinks had been ironed out and it won over gamers and critics alike. And the success it saw was probably just as much down to the platform it appeared on as its quality. The game's edgy, brutal sports spin on the racing genre found an effortless fan base among the teenage Mega Drive audience, with its user base demanding a staple diet of less cutesy videogame fare.



» [Mega Drive] From the very outset, *Road Rash* strived to offer an immersive racing experience by giving personalities to the rival racers in the game. Remember wanting to punch this smug git?

BUILDING ON THE ORIGINAL

Randy tells us there were plenty of ideas that the team was not able to include in the first game, and so when *Road Rash* became a success, there was an opportunity to implement them and build on the original game in the sequels.

If there was one thing in particular that the original *Road Rash* was sorely lacking, it was



GRAZING SADDLES

simultaneous multiplayer. While it did feature a two-player mode, it saw players having to take turns in their own single-player game, which simply wasn't the same. Thankfully, though, EA remedied this in the sequel by offering two players the chance to compete in three flavours of multiplayer: the original take-turns method, a new split-screen mode that allowed players to compete in the same tournament simultaneously, or a duel game called Mano A Mano, in which two players raced head-to-head without NPC riders on any of the five tracks in the game.

Road Rash II's premise again saw players climbing the ranks of an illegal motorcycle competition, but one that was now stretched a little further afield – the tracks in *Road Rash II* were set in different American states, rather than just California. All the core elements, such as the fighting system, the rival biker interaction, having tracks grow longer with each new class and the bike buying were carried across.

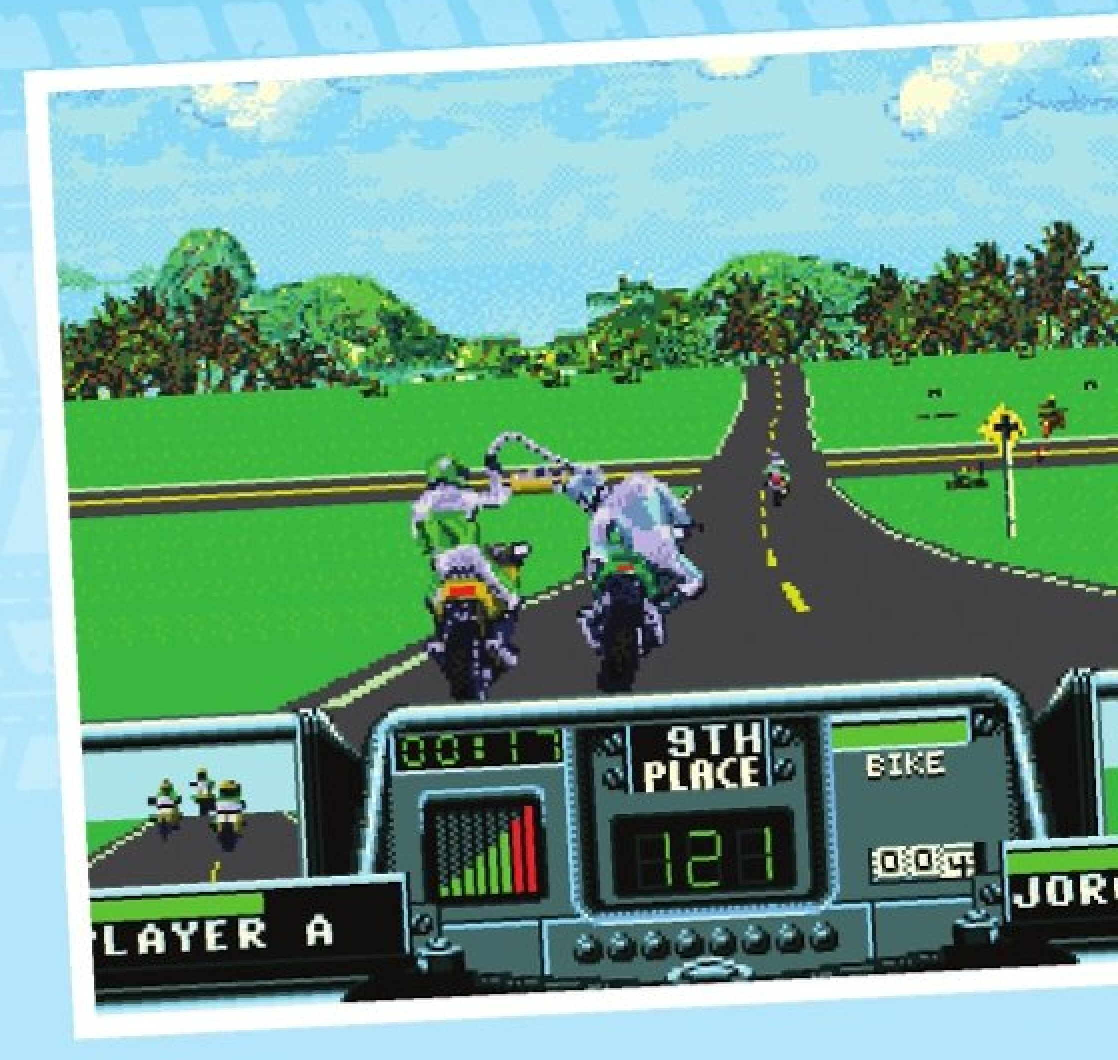
In fact, *Road Rash II* really feels more like fine-tuning than an out-and-out sequel, not that there's anything wrong with that. EA was clearly wise to the fact that fans would want more of the same biker-brawling action, and so improved the formula.

Certainly the most innovative thing that the sequel introduces is a more varied combat system. Chains were added to the melee, and different attacks and weapons now inflicted different amounts of damage on bikers too. Whereas before a few punches to a rival's visor was generally all that was needed to send them spiralling to the tarmac, fights now felt more involved, with bikers trading blows as they weaved between the traffic. In addition, *Road Rash II* also introduced bikes with nitrous oxide injections. Offering players a temporary speed boost over their bike's top speed, the injections were only fitted to the more powerful 'Nitro' class bikes in the game, meaning players had to accumulate quite a bit of cash for the chance to use them.

ROAD RASHERS

With the success of two *Road Rash* titles, the series was beginning to hit its stride and become a hot property for EA. As a result, three separate *Road Rash* games were then put into development internally, almost simultaneously, for three different machines: the Mega Drive, the Sega CD and the upcoming 3DO.

Formed by entrepreneur and Electronic Arts co-founder Trip Hawkins, The 3DO Company had partnered with a number of big consumer electronics companies for the manufacture of its new state-of-the-art 32-bit CD-based console, the self-titled 3DO. Electronic Arts was one of its partners and supported the system in a software capacity, releasing exclusive games for the machine based on its most popular franchises of the time: *FIFA*, *Need For Speed* and *Road Rash*.



The 3DO version of *Road Rash*, simply titled *Road Rash* despite its differences to the original, can almost be seen as a remastering of the concept rather than a sequel or remake. Regarded by many as the pinnacle of the series, it takes all the core *Road Rash* staples and exposes them to the 32-bit processing power of the 3DO to create a nitrous-injected version of the game, boasting faster gameplay, photorealistic visuals and a great soundtrack too.

It returns to the California setting of the first game, and sees two of the original tracks make a return: Pacific Coast Highway and Sierra Nevada. The gameplay, weapons, fighting system and way players progressed through the game remained the same as in previous games. Players once again had to climb the competition ranks by racing on slowly unfurling roads, which now featured branching sections, and purchasing better bikes with race winnings, but this time the game was divided into two modes: Thrash mode, a pick-up-and-play arcade game in which players picked a race and were thrown straight into the action; and







SKITCHIN'

■ Understandably wanting to capitalise on *Road Rash*'s success by repurposing its impressive engine in other scenarios, Electronic Arts looked to the world of inline skating for the 1993 Mega Drive game *Skitchin'*. Designed by David Warfield, it was positioned to take advantage of the rollerblade craze that was sweeping America at the time, and in terms of its gameplay, it 'skitched' – the art of clinging to the back of a car while skating – on the back of *Road Rash* by mixing combat with racing. It's not a complete carbon copy, though, as it introduces a few new ideas to the formula. It adds stunts to the mix and has a better upgrade system, allowing players to purchase new wheels, skates and safety equipment with their race winnings.

Big Game mode, in which players picked a specific biker with a signature bike and a different skill set and then played through a sort of career mode.

The visuals received the biggest overhaul, with the cartoonish character sprites dropped for photorealistic ones, which lent the game a new meaner, grittier look that suited the series brilliantly, and EA also made the 3DO *Road Rash* more immersive: rival bikers each had a distinct personality that reacted dynamically to what was going on in the tournament, and players had a status meter to help them determine how much notoriety and respect they were earning in the game from their fellow rashers.

To finish off this exciting new next-gen interpretation of *Road Rash*, Randy and the team would also make use of the high-quality sound and FMV capabilities of the 3DO by including a memorable rock and grunge soundtrack and live-action cut-scenes in the game. As Randy explains, though, getting these elements into the game wasn't an entirely painless process.

"I wanted to really exploit the CD, which led to the music video concepts and the soundtrack featuring Soundgarden," he says. "I was a fan at the time and our marketing director, Leslie Mansford, had a relationship with A&M Records – she introduced me. I never got a chance to meet Chris Cornell but I was told he was a fan of the Genesis games and played them on the tour bus. Getting a music deal done was a nightmare. There was no precedent – these kind of deals hadn't been done yet and licensing expectations were based on movie deals. We eventually got it done, perhaps made easier by their own interest in the game. We used the music in the presentation and music videos and had the fortune of including newly released songs from *Superunknown*, just as Soundgarden was really breaking out. I would have loved to include streamed music in the game but we were already streaming graphics and it was deemed too challenging to get it done."

"I directed and rode some of the bikes in the video along with art director Jeff Smith and other local AFM club racers from the area," Randy adds. "This included my own yellow Yamaha FZR 1000, which was featured on an earlier *Road Rash* cover, along with a red Ducati 900SS, which was a prop we had purchased for shooting the animatics. On the last day of the video shoot I wheelied the bike away from two police cars in San Francisco but had to hit the brakes hard to keep from going through the red light at the next intersection. The front tyre slid on the greasy San Francisco street and I laid the bike down. Marketing found the wrecked bike useful and after making a few trips to trade shows it found a home in the EA corporate lobby, where it sits today."

The other two games, the US-only Sega CD version and *Road Rash 3: Tour De Force* used content derived from the 3DO game. The Sega CD version was essentially a 16-bit remake of the 3DO game using the original Mega Drive engine. Impressively, it keeps the same tracks, menu screens, modes, music and FMV cut-scenes, and it's only when you actually enter a race that you notice a difference – the game looks like a prettier and smoother version of *Road Rash 3*. It doesn't matter, though, because it's still a great *Road Rash* title. It even manages to get one up on the 3DO version by managing to have streaming music played during the races.

TOUR DE FORCE

Though *Road Rash 3: Tour De Force*, the final *Road Rash* game released for the Mega Drive,



» [Mega Drive] Atypical of most racing games of the time, *Road Rash*'s tracks gradually increased in size, with rival bikes becoming more deadly and the roads more congested.

» [Mega Drive] *Road Rash II* was the first game in the series to include simultaneous multiplayer. It became a staple of the series until the release of *Road Rash 3D*, before returning in *Jailbreak*.

GRAZING SADDLES



» [Mega Drive] The sequel introduced comical cut-scenes that flashed up at the end of each race… or if you got busted for being rubbish, like us.

also used content from the 3DO game, it was a completely new instalment, with only superficial connections to its 32-bit stablemate – most notably in the way it attempts unsuccessfully to display photorealistic bikers. As the game's title implies, this time the tournament went international, leaving America for tracks set in six countries, including Brazil, Germany, Australia and the UK. It was another solid entry in the series, although its visuals aren't as crisp as *Road Rash II*, and once again it's a fairly safe sequel that doesn't play about with the formula much. The only notable thing it adds is the chance to purchase specific upgrades for your bike.

Road Rash 3 wasn't as popular as its predecessors, and with *Road Rash* for the 3DO raising the bar and showing fans what they could now expect from next-gen *Road Rash* games, the series finally had to wave goodbye to the platform that made it a success.

RIDE ANGRY 3D

After finishing work on *Road Rash* for the 3DO, Randy then worked as executive producer on *Road Rash 3D* for the PlayStation, and also offered creative direction on the following game in the series, *Road Rash: Jailbreak*. Wanting to keep the franchise at the front of the pack in a technical sense, EA had felt a pressure to move away from the sprite-based graphics of old and make its next *Road Rash* title a completely new 3D polygonal racing game instead.

Road Rash 3D was an ambitious project that struggled to balance the racing, combat and an extra dimension. The fighting hardly seemed to get a look in during races, with computer riders bickering and fighting among themselves, and as a result the game felt more like a straight arcade racer than a *Road Rash* title. It also lacked any kind of multiplayer mode, which disappointed fans, and visually it looked a little choppy.

"The first PlayStation version of the game was a port of the 3DO, but the trend on PlayStation was 3D and we wanted to transition *Road Rash* away from 2.5D graphics. This turned out to be extremely ambitious given the capability of the platform," answers Randy when we ask him about some of the issues in *Road Rash 3D*. "Articulated

VEHICULAR MANSLAUGHTER

Road Rash wasn't the first game to mix combat with racing…

S.T.U.N. RUNNER

Atari's fantastic polygonal racing game, which ran from its *Hard Drivin'* hardware, remains one of the best examples of high-octane vehicular combat ever made, in our opinion. Sitting behind the wheel of a state-of-the-art bobsled, players had to scud through tunnel networks and maintain an optimum speed by keeping to the correct racing line and blasting away any poor vehicles that were unfortunate enough to be in their way.

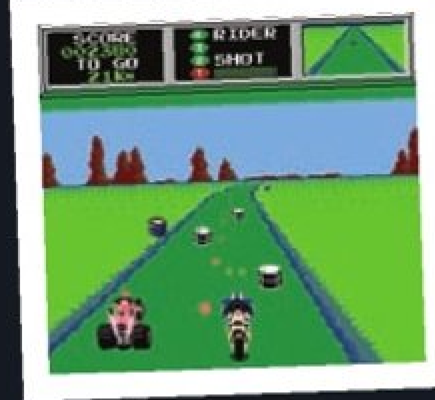


FIGHTING ROLLER



Possibly the campest fighting game ever made, *Fighting Roller* mixes the radical world of rollerskating with the equally radical world of unarmed combat. Controlling a spandex hero with a sun-coloured mullet, this into-the-screen racer sees you jumping and dodging obstacles while occasionally fighting pathetically with rival skaters who appear from the bottom of the screen. It's colourful and a bit odd. That's all it has going for it.

MACH RIDER



A launch game for the NES, *Mach Rider* is a distant relative to the *F-Zero* series and was actually based on an early Nintendo toy from the Seventies. A *Hang-On*-style racing game with shoot-'em-up bits, players take on the role of a motorcycle superhero who stars in a *Mad Max*-style yarn about patrolling roads, avoiding obstacles and blasting away Quadrunners – an unsavoury gang of bikers who have somehow managed to enslave the world.

SEICROSS



This early side-scrolling racing game from Nichibutsu is set in the distant future and finds players storming an enemy fortress on a hover bike. Enemy riders harass the player by shunting them into objects and the scenery, and you can retaliate by either bumping them back or blasting them into flaming wrecks with your guns. As everything in the game kills you outright, the action is pretty intense and frustrating.

3D DEATHCHASE



As **Retro Gamer** has a policy whereby it cannot go more than three issues without mentioning *3D Deathchase*, we've had to include it here in order to keep the magazine ticking over. Mervyn Estcourt's popular 3D bike shooter was an absolute marvel when it appeared on the Spectrum. Taking its cues from the speeder bike chase in *Return Of The Jedi*, the game sees players dodging trees and blasting away rival bikers. *Action Biker* meets *Doom* it most certainly wasn't.



characters and doing collision detection on animated bikes with detachable objects such as weapons turns out to be far more complex than 3D car games of the time that had to animate the wheels and the reflection of the rear window. We were pushing the limits of what the machine could do but were confined by the expectations of the game's concept. The first 3D version took longer than expected as a result, in development for more than two years. Neither of them fully reached their potential in my view given hardware limitations. The freedom of 3D also produces far greater range of movement, which adds complexity to the gameplay. As a result, these products lacked some of the ease of use the earlier titles had. There was also more creative struggle over the balance of fighting versus racing within the team."

"THE 3DO GAME RAISED THE BAR AND SHOWED FANS WHAT THEY COULD EXPECT FROM NEXT-GEN ROAD RASH GAMES"

Road Rash: Jailbreak was released a year later and was notable for dropping the tournament premise for a story that saw players climbing the ranks inside rival biker gangs to spring a mate out of the clink. The game added a few game modes and twists to the *Road Rash* formula, such as introducing road hogs to the bike roster, a fun sidecar mode that put one player in charge of steering while another concentrated on the fighting, and a pursuit mode called Five-O that let players take on the role of a motorcycle cop tasked with chasing down and busting speeding bikers. Clearly trying to address the criticism that *Road Rash 3D* was a little light on the combat, the game featured 11 weapons, including cattle prods and nunchaku, and also attack combos and special moves.

A few months before *Jailbreak*'s release, N64 owners also received a taste of 3D *Road Rash* by way of *Road Rash 64*. The only game in the series not to have been designed and developed by EA, the property was licensed to THQ and the game produced by Pacific Coast Power & Light (now Locomotive Games), a studio co-founded by former EA employee and EA Sports founder Don Traeger.

Sharing a number of similarities with *Jailbreak*, at one stage during development it was thought that the games were one and the same. *Road Rash 64* is widely considered to be the strongest 3D entry in the series to date, harnessing the 64-bit power of the N64 to throw plenty at the screen at once. The action manages to show a large number of riders fighting on screen, while maintaining a decent frame rate. This does come at a slight cost, however. Detail is dropped, and the riders have a strange cartoon aesthetic to them, but this was a conscious design decision to ensure that the game felt fast and maintained smooth gameplay throughout. Similar to *Jailbreak*, *Road Rash 64* also had the strong emphasis on combat, and a lot of the same weapons appear in both games. In *Road Rash 64*, though, they could be used in combination. For example, players could use a Taser or a cattle prod to temporarily stun rival racers and then follow up with a swing of a bat or club to knock them off their bikes. *Road Rash 64* offered more control over the races than other games in the series, allowing players to adjust variables such as traffic and pedestrian congestion, as well as the number of police and opponents who you are racing against.

In 2000, a short time after the release of *Jailbreak*, Randy left EA to join LucasArts Entertainment, where he worked as vice president of product development. Today, he is the CEO of SGN (Social Gaming Network), one of the largest game publishers on the iPhone, and drives a Ducati to work.

Sensing that *Road Rash* is clearly a series that is still very close to Randy's heart, we finish our time by asking the industry veteran if he's aware of any attempts by EA to revive the *Road Rash* franchise since his departure, and how he would feel about seeing a new *Road Rash* game released today without his involvement.

"I'm aware of a few attempts by EA to revive the series, each terminated for one reason or another thus far. My view is the core teams of the early versions had a clear vision for what we were creating. I suspect later attempts may have lacked the focus or adherence to the core themes or the passion for the concept. *Road Rash* struck a balance between racing, action and entertainment and managed to be a bit edgy and funny without going too far over the top. It is one of very few original properties created by EA. I'm very proud of the work our teams did at the time. I believe the theme is as relevant now as it was then and much more viable in 3D with today's hardware. My hope is that EA will revive the series with the same care and passion."



» [3DO] For many people, *Road Rash* on the 3DO is the apex of the series. The game was later ported in its entirety to the PlayStation.

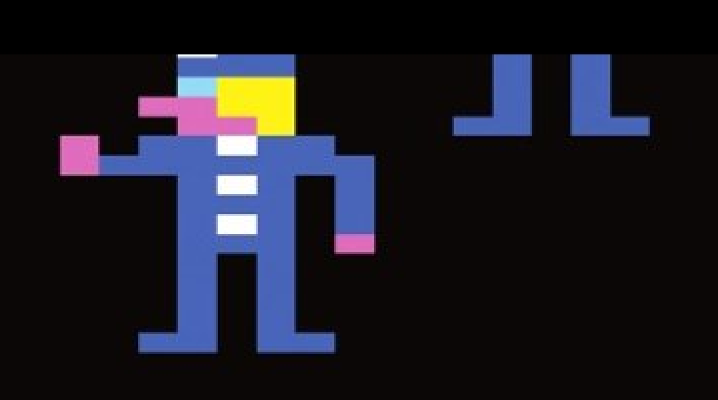


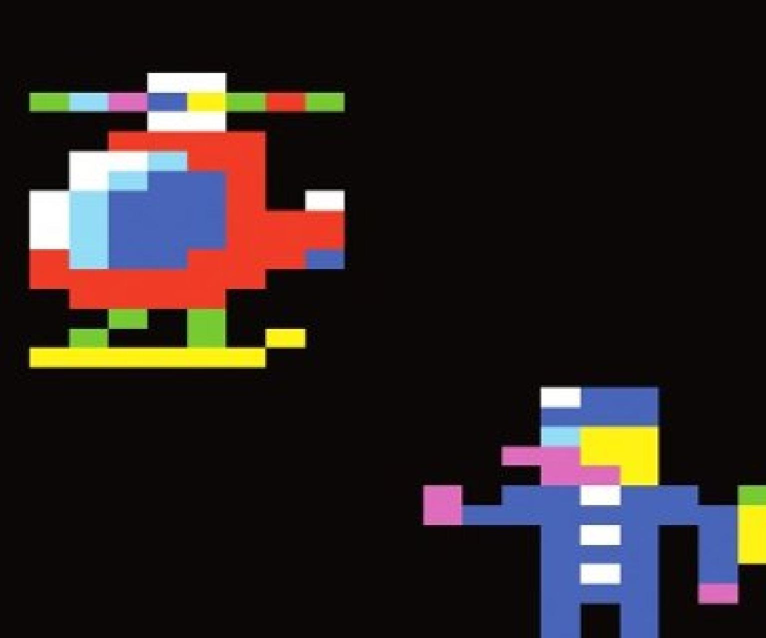
» [N64] *Road Rash 64* might not look like anything special, but it's loaded with options and is incredibly slick. Its multiplayer also supported four players.



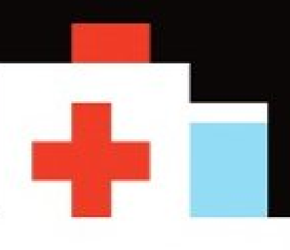


Special thanks to Trip Hawkins for putting us in touch with Randy Breen and to Randy himself for answering our questions





Daredevil Dennis

EVEL KNIEVEL NEVER HAD THIS MUCH FUN

» RETROREVIVAL



» BBC MICRO
» VISIONS
» 1984

Simon Pick's *Daredevil Dennis* proves that you don't need overly complicated controls to create a fun game. You just need a really good idea and the ability to execute it well.

Indeed, just three keys are the key (ho ho) to success in Pick's surprisingly addictive stunt-fest platformer. Shift accelerates you, Return brings your vehicle to a stop and the Space Bar launches you majestically into the air. By manipulating these three buttons you can weave your way past a number of hazards to earn as much stunt money as possible.

Starting at the top of the screen (which is divided into four parts) you simply race through each stage, avoiding the onscreen objects that stand in your way. Initially you'll be presented with little more than annoyances – a static house here, a slow policeman there – but you'll be given an insane amount of obstacles to clear on the higher difficulty levels. Add in the fact that constantly moving hazards like ambulances and helicopters are gradually introduced and you'll need nerves of steel and the reactions of a hyperactive mongoose just to clear the first wave of Ace mode, let alone the entire screen.

The beauty of *Daredevil Dennis,* though, is that the tight controls and nigh-on-perfect collision detection ensure that you never feel that the game is punishing you for your mistakes. After Dennis has finished comically waving his legs in the air after each crash you'll simply get on your bike again, utterly convinced that you'll finally clear that last hurdle.

A Commodore 64 version also exists, but despite sharing the same name it's actually a sequel (as shown on its title screen). While the core elements remain the same, a backstory has been added – Dennis's Oscar has been stolen by his cousin and he has to retrieve it – and there is an additional stage, which involves Dennis running through a meadow and bursting balloons, set to some amazingly twee music.

While it's an acceptable sequel, it's made difficult by falling packages of Oscar pieces that Dennis needs to collect while avoiding the hazards. Stick with the BBC original as it feels purer and is a lot more fun. *




ATTACK OF THE CLONES

Fortunately, anxious readers can rest assured that there's still only one Stuart Campbell

It's always risky to make sweeping generalisations about your audience, but with this being Retro Gamer and everything we're going to go out on a limb and say that most of us were lured into the magical world of videogaming via the neon lights and sticky carpets of the amusement arcade. And the reason we bought the home computers we recall so fondly in these pages was primarily because we wanted to replicate something of that atmosphere in our own homes, without choking on cigarette smoke or falling foul of the drug dealers, sex criminals and murderers who were widely held by the media and our parents to inhabit such places. And also without having to buy an Atari VCS, whose games sold for what now equates to something like £80 each.

The fledgling games industry was a strange blend of innocence and lawless frontier spirit back in those days, though, and the idea of obtaining an official licence from copyright holders to reproduce their coin-op properties was as alien as, well, an invader from space. So for the first few years of the home computer boom, what we got instead was the attack of the clones, a lawless wilderness where copyright didn't matter.

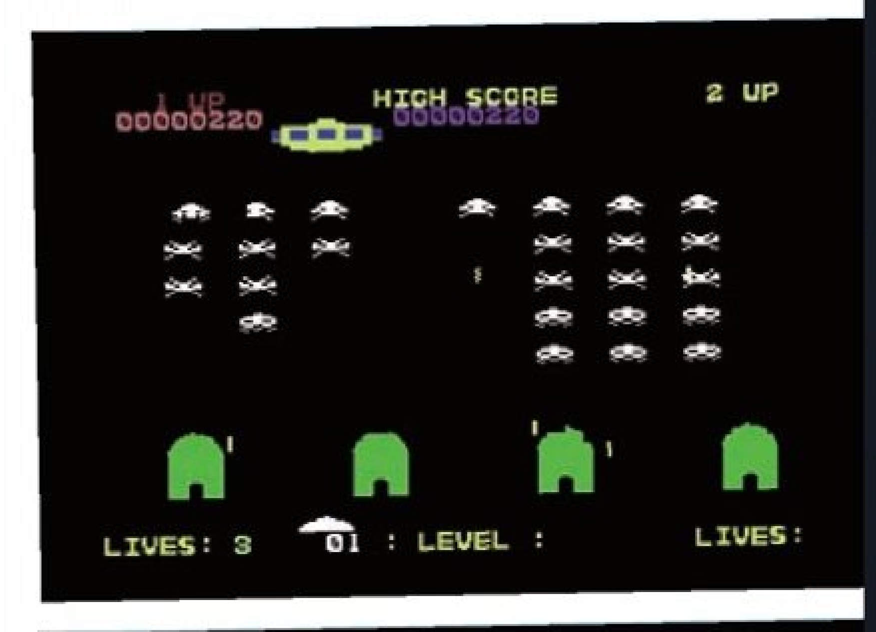
INVADERS 64

■ (1984, Livewire for C64)

We start at what, for most people, was the beginning, and immediately encounter one of the oddest things about the history of 8-bit computing – the bizarre fact that there was never a really good copy of *Space Invaders* available on any home computer released in the UK.

It's odd because *Space Invaders* offers far fewer challenges to the unofficial cloner than most coin-ops of the time. Its graphics were essentially monochrome so even the Spectrum should have been able to manage something that looked very close to the original, it wasn't exactly lightning fast, and it was basically a single screen over and over again. In fact, those are probably the reasons nobody bothered doing it properly – even in the early Eighties, *Space Invaders* was already thought of as old hat and boring.

Livewire's C64 clone, though, is about as close as anyone got. It looks and plays pretty much like the arcade game and is only really let down by the absurd sound effect for firing, which is more akin to a particularly unpleasant outbreak of explosive diarrhoea than a laser gun.









PLANETOID

■ (1982, Acornsoft for BBC Micro)

Conversely, *Defender* should have been a much harder job. Fast, scrolling, complicated controls, packed with action and reliant for much of its appeal on what were, for the time, spectacular effects, it asked a lot more of the creaky CPUs of 8-bit machines than *Space Invaders*. Yet almost every format had at least one great *Defender* clone, from *Guardian* on the C64 to *Starblitz* on the Spectrum, and the most legendary of all is unquestionably Acornsoft's mighty *Planetoid*, which, indeed, was originally released under the name *Defender*, until some primitive copyright lawyers got involved.

Visually almost indistinguishable from the real thing – at a glance, anyway – and every bit as ferociously demanding, *Planetoid* set a high watermark for arcade conversions that Acornsoft would spend years trying to live up to.

"The idea of obtaining an official licence to reproduce coin-op properties was as alien as a space invader"





PHEENIX

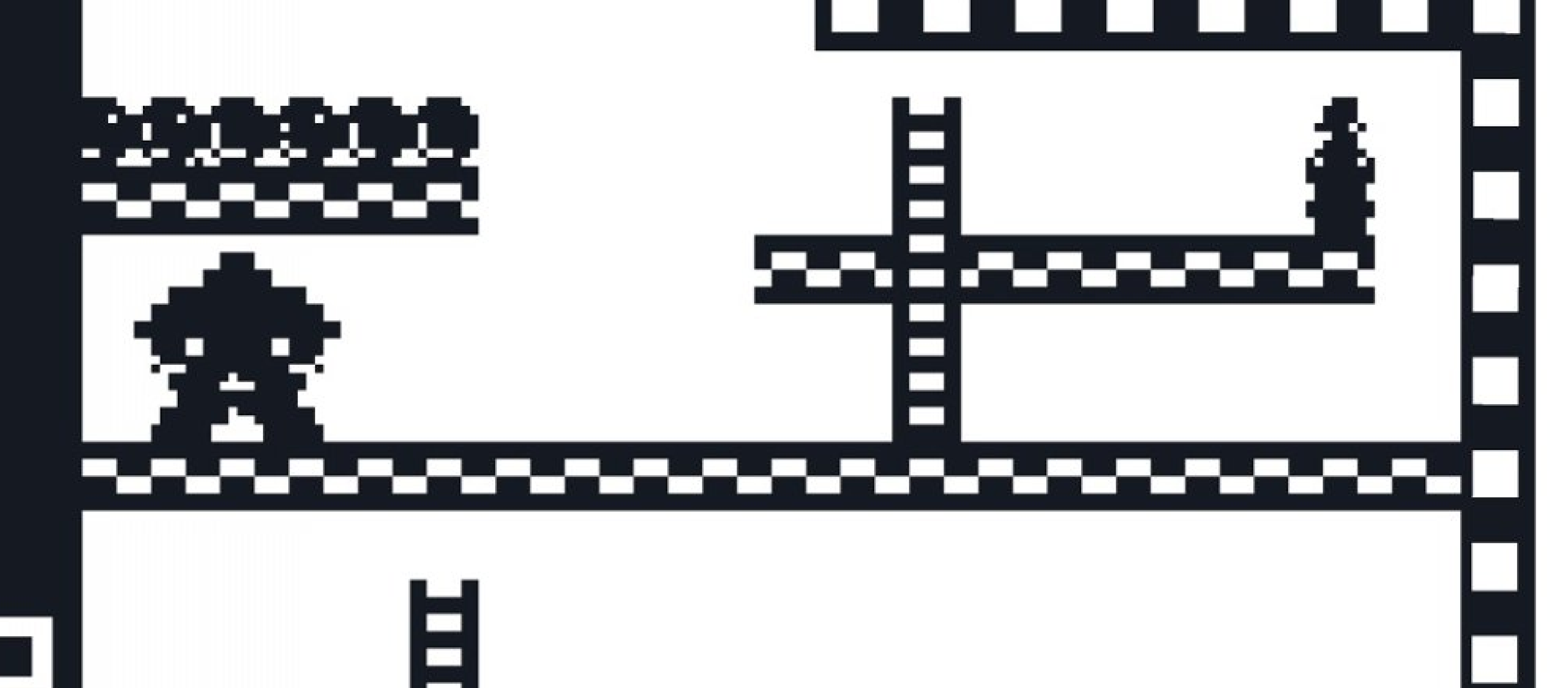
■ (1983, Megadodo for Spectrum)

EAGLE EMPIRE

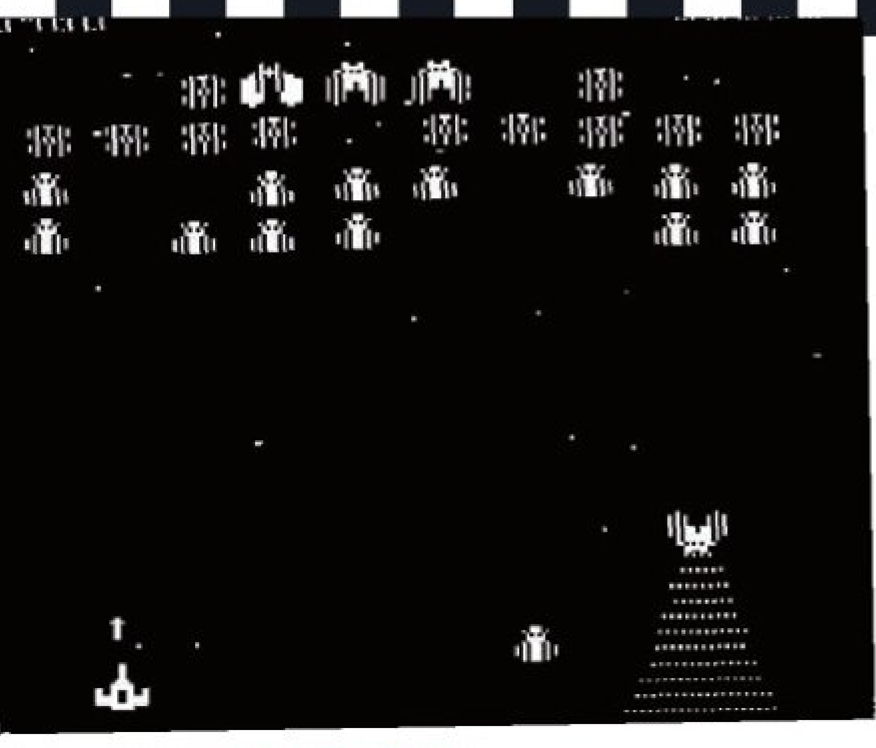
■ (1984, Alligata for C64)

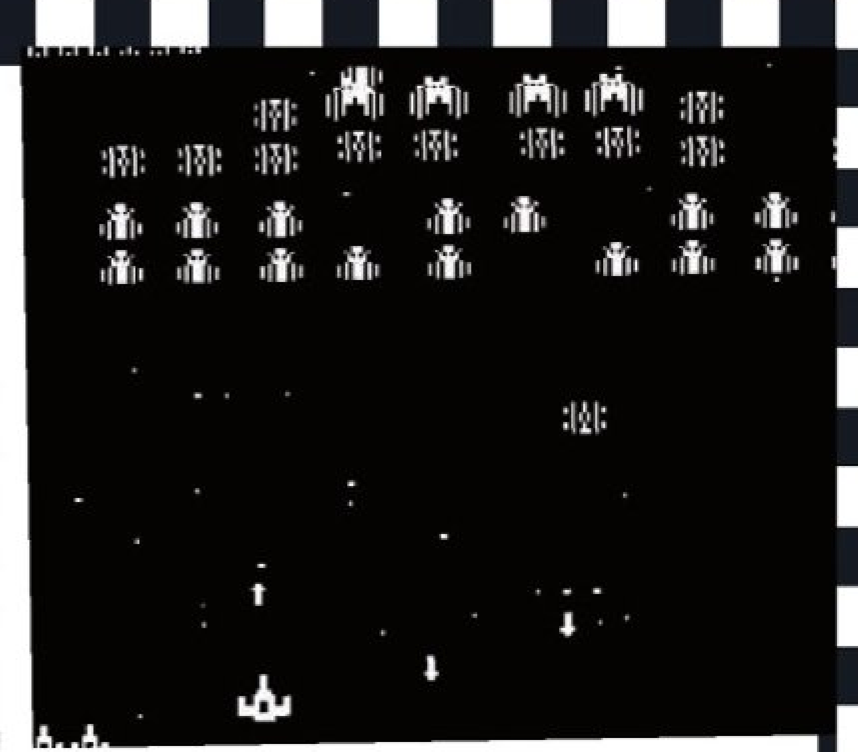
Centuri's 1980 coin-op *Phoenix* is celebrated for a number of reasons, including being one of the first games to feature multiple different types of attack wave and the first to feature a boss stage. All of its features were replicated superbly in 8-bit ports, but sadly not all in the same one.

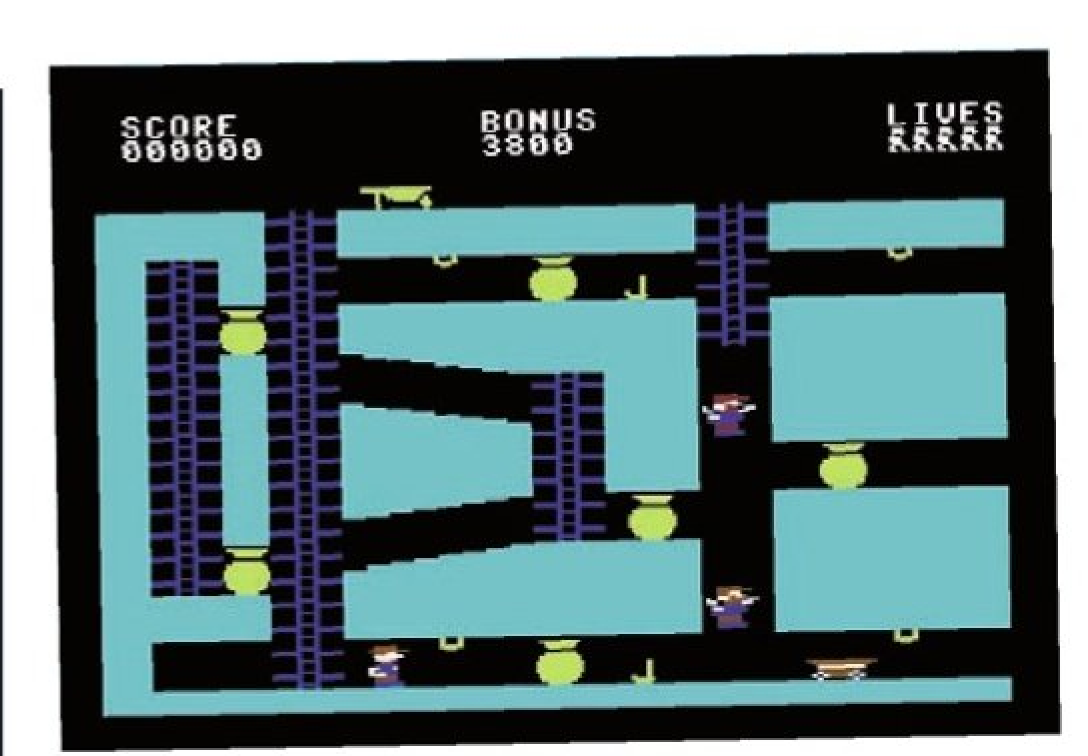
Eagle Empire looks like a star candidate, with a near-flawless rendition of the arcade visuals – right down to the funny limb-waggling 'walk' of your spaceship – and a very convincing stab at the gameplay, but then blows it at the vital moment with a dismally weak attempt at the famous mothership stage. *Pheenix*, meanwhile, can't capture the look of the game quite as well with the Speccy's restricted palette, but matches *Eagle Empire* for gameplay in the first four rounds then delivers a boss stage that's much closer to the proper one. Splice *Pheenix*'s gameplay into *Eagle Empire*'s graphics and you'd have the perfect *Phoenix* clone.



ATTACK OF THE CLONES







GILLIGAN'S GOLD

■ (1984, Ocean for C64/Spectrum)

Manchester behemoth Ocean would go on to become the biggest publisher in the 8-bit world, as well as the number one acquirer of legitimate licences – whether for games, movies, rock bands or other properties – but in its early days the company was a non-stop production line for unofficial arcade clones. Many were obvious – see if you can work out which games *Caterpilla*, *Hopper*, *Cosmic Intruders* and *Monster Muncher* were ripping off – but Ocean also specialised in quietly copying obscure titles that most people in the UK had never heard of, the most notable of which was *Gilligan's Gold*.

Based on Stern's 1982 mining game *Bagman*, *Gilligan's Gold* is actually one of the most impressively accurate conversion jobs of the era. Even on the Spectrum it looked very much like its arcade counterpart, despite being in landscape orientation when the coin-op was in portrait, and played almost identically. Indeed, it even ramped the speed up a little and added continuous music, which Stern's version lacked, while maintaining the arcade game's fearsome difficulty. Rarely given the credit it deserves – possibly because half the people who played it never got off the first screen – *Gilligan's Gold* is right at the zenith of the unofficial cloner's art.

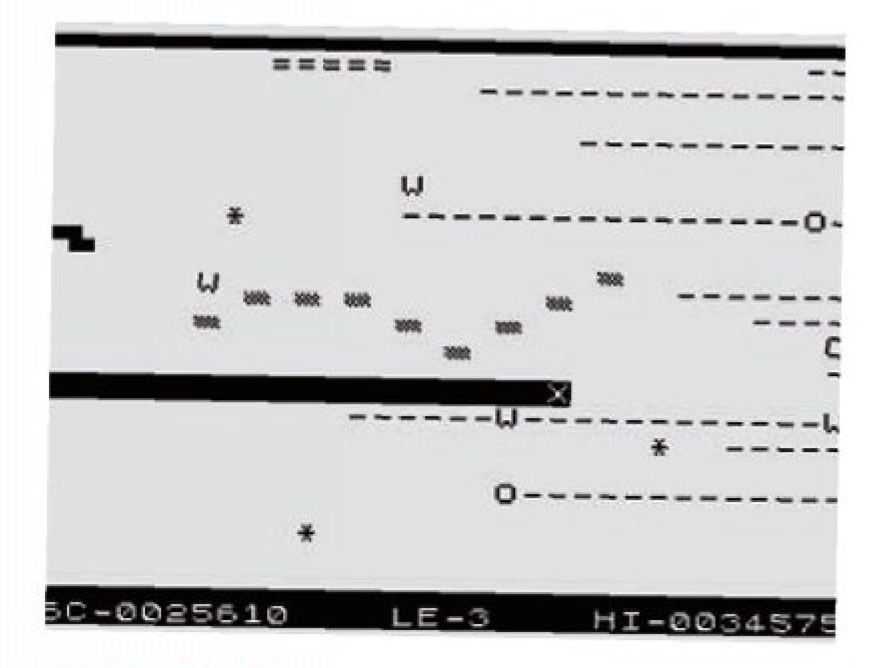
GALAGON

■ (1984, Microdeal for Dragon 32)

Namco's iconic *Galaxian* was one of the most-imitated games of the early years of home micros, but as with *Space Invaders* nobody ever really nailed it. Acornsoft's BBC version, *Arcadians*, is the most acclaimed unofficial clone, and while it gets most things right, its jerky attacks rob it of the sweeping, curving elegance that was *Galaxian*'s hallmark. The sequel, *Galaga*, though, fared a bit better.

The most fondly recalled version is probably Nick 'Orlando' Pelling's homage on the BBC Micro, the lovely looking *Zalaga*, but played nowadays it's insanely fast and unfair. The most faithful translation, though not the prettiest nor most colourful, is Microdeal's excellent Dragon knockoff, *Galagon*. We'll be hearing more of the Cornwall-based publisher in this feature, and *Galagon* is typical of its diligent and painstaking work, replicating the arcade game almost perfectly, if a little slowly. Despite being a tad sluggish, though, it feels just like the original, which is much more important.

"Try to work out what Caterpilla, Hopper, Cosmic Intruders and Monster Muncher were ripping off"

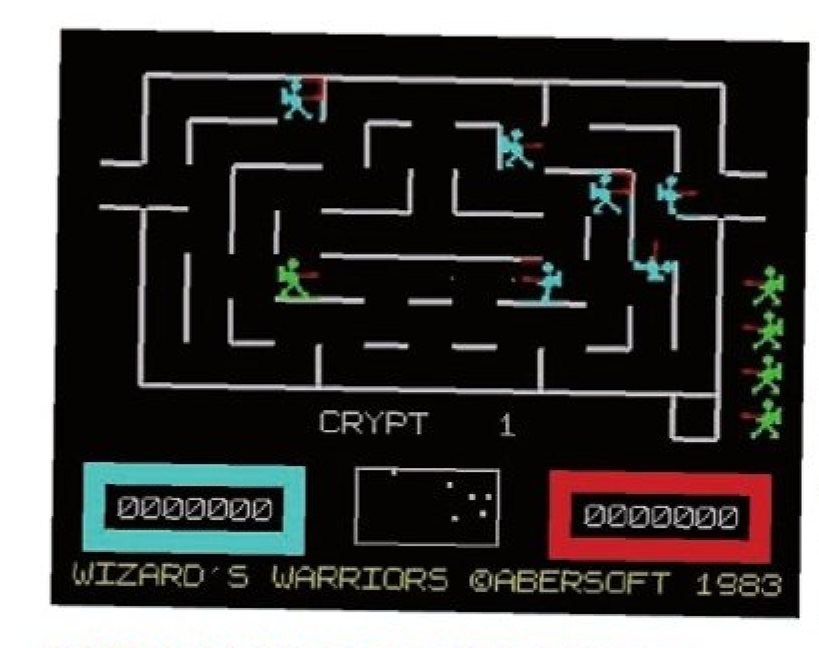


TEMPEST

■ (1981, Mikro-Gen for ZX81)

And if we're talking about feel as the most important consideration in a coin-op clone, we can't pass by without giving another mention to one of the most impressive achievements in British videogame coding history.

We've written about SP Kelly's incredible ZX81 version of Atari's majestic *Tempest* before, but it really is an astounding feat – taking a colour, vector graphics arcade machine with pseudo-3D graphics and a dedicated dial controller and transferring it to a silent, monochrome home computer with a resolution of 32 by 22 pixels and a flat rubber touch keyboard, yet somehow managing to capture the essence of the game completely and create something that's still enormously playable 30 years later. We make no apologies for covering it again, because if you care even the tiniest bit about videogames you need to see this and marvel at its brilliance.





THE WIZARD'S WARRIORS

■ (1983, Abersoft for Spectrum)

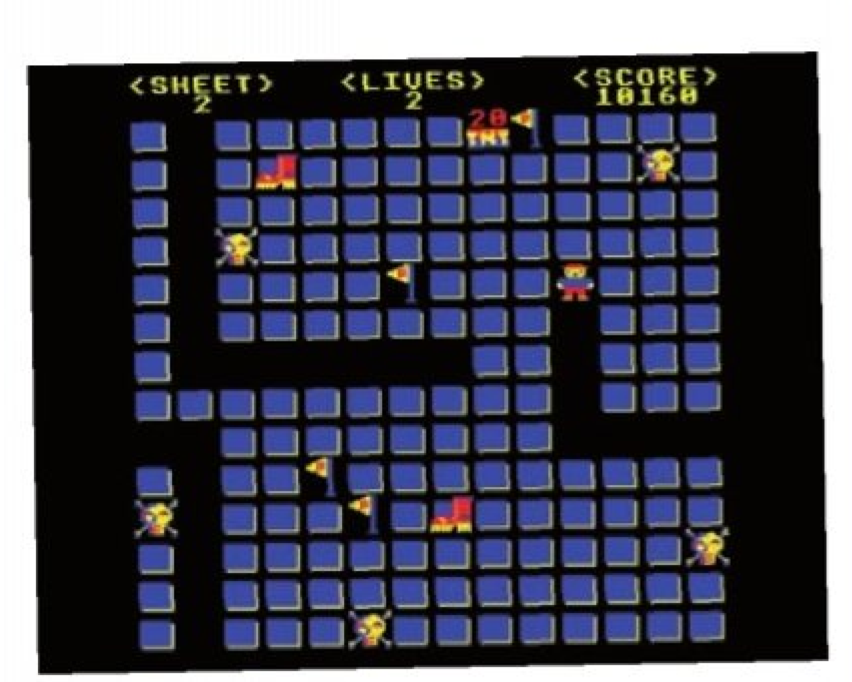
Some little-known coin-ops, meanwhile, lived at both ends of the conversion scale. On certain formats they got full official ports, whereas on others they were ignored by licence owners and knockoff merchants alike. *The Wizard's Warriors* is the only unofficial version of Midway's 1980 dungeon battler *Wizard Of Wor* that we know of for any home micro, which is a shame as it's a great game – like a super-intense, faster and more claustrophobic version of *Berzerk* – that deserves to be better remembered. The Speccy version replaces all the different monsters with clone soldiers, making it much less wizardy in the process, but otherwise it's a great translation with a loving eye for the original's details, even though most of its players wouldn't have known the difference.

DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON

■ (1984, Ocean for C64/Spectrum)

On the subject of the best of the unofficial clones, we should stop and award a medal to one of the first games that showed how home ports could be substantially better than the arcade titles they were copying. Konami's 1983 *Track & Field* was a landmark athletics game with six events, but *Decathlon* was a respectable facsimile of it that managed to extend that number to ten.

The Speccy version looked a lot more like the coin-op and allowed for button controls – weirdly, the C64 version didn't, insisting on having you destroy your joystick even though *Track & Field* was always a button-controlled game and the C64 had plenty of buttons – but it infamously turned Daley Thompson white and robbed him of his trademark 'tache. The C64, on the other hand, wasn't split into what amounted to two separately loaded pentathlons, and authentically let you have two players at once in the race events. In such ways do format wars really kick off.



DANGER UXB

■ (1983, Micro Power for BBC Micro)

Another pretty obscure game, but one that, unlike *Bagman* and *Wizard Of Wor*, seemed to get a disproportionate amount of attention from early Eighties coders, was Zilec-Zenitone's quirky bomb-defusing coin-op *Checkman*. Perhaps due to its simple, block-based gameplay, the game was the subject of many pretty good home replicas, including *Timebomb* on the Speccy and *Gridtrap* on the C64. The best, though, was Micro Power's BBC effort, which did a great job of maintaining the arcade game's speed and even found time to sneak in a little bonus mini-game between rounds where *Checkman* only had a cut-scene.

If anything, in fact, *Danger UXB* starts off even faster than its inspiration, and even finds time to add a beginner mode where it's just you and the bombs against the clock, without the troublesome stomping Dr Martens that chase you around. It's one thing to make a decent clone, but actually improving the source material a little along the way is fine work indeed.

SPACE PILOT

■ (1983, Anirog for C64)

***Space Pilot* is** a game with all sorts of personal resonances for us. For one, the coin-op it's based on, Konami's *Time Pilot*, brings back memories of racking up 2,007,700 points in an arcade in Falkirk, missing three trains home in the process, only to fail to get on the high-score table. And secondly, it was one of the few games whose magazine ads could make a Speccy owner jealously wish that they had a C64.

The Speccy didn't have any *Time Pilot* clones at all, far less one this good. Anirog's knockoff is amazingly close to the experience of the coin-op, and all the more impressive for capturing it without the benefit of the original's unique joystick, which had no centre position. It handles the omni-directional scrolling and the large number of sprites superbly, with only minor occasional slowdown, and it looks and feels just like playing *Time Pilot* in your own home.



WRONG KONG PONG SONG

Well, okay, there's no song. But these strong contenders for worst arcade clone ever sure are lamentable. We're not quite sure why *Donkey Kong* was done so badly so often – it's not the most complex game – but for some reason even the worst coin-op copies never seem to plumb the depths as badly as a really terrible *Kong*.





Krazy Kong

(1983, PSS, Spectrum)

Kong looks more like a ninja in a gimp suit and the jump animation is something to behold. The least dreadful of the five games in this list, so if you're in a hurry just play this one and marvel at how mind-numbingly appalling the others must be.



Killer Kong

(1983, Blaby, Spectrum)

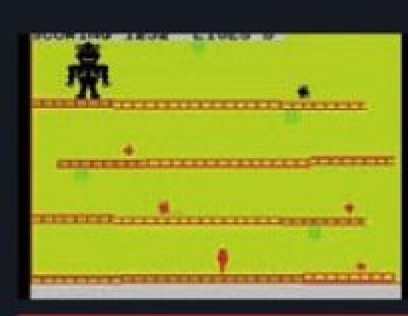
We had to take a screenshot of the Game Over screen for this, because *Killer Kong* flickers so badly that you can't get one of the barrels if they're moving. You don't even get a running jump – it's straight up and down or nothing. Absolutely dire.



Kong

(1983, Anirog, Spectrum)

A game where two barrels moving the same way can fall down from the same girder then roll off in opposite directions. Good luck with that!





Krazy Kong

(1982, C-Tech, Spectrum)

We remember the flood of angry letters to *CVG* about this. Our favourite bit is the interactive loading, where you have to manually switch Caps Lock on halfway through – if you don't, the game won't start – and the impressively bad controls.





Wally Kong

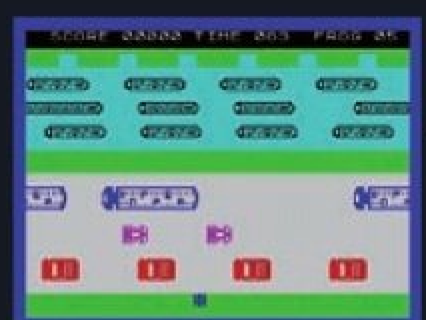
(1984, Walltone, Spectrum)

On choosing a level, you always seem to start on the same one. And *Wally Kong* manages to get worse after that – we especially love not being able to jump straight up, and the inability to jump at all if you're within three squares of a ladder.

ATTACK OF THE CLONES



OCEAN'S ROAD TO RESPECTABILITY



1. Road Frog
(Spectrum, 1983)

This crude *Frogger* rip-off contented itself with brazenly stealing the concept and style of a single game. Not even an attempt to hide its 'inspiration'.



2. Eskimo Eddie
(C64, 1983)

Two muggings for the price of one in this example, as the *Pengo* clone of the main game is preceded by a single-stage *Donkey Kong* level.



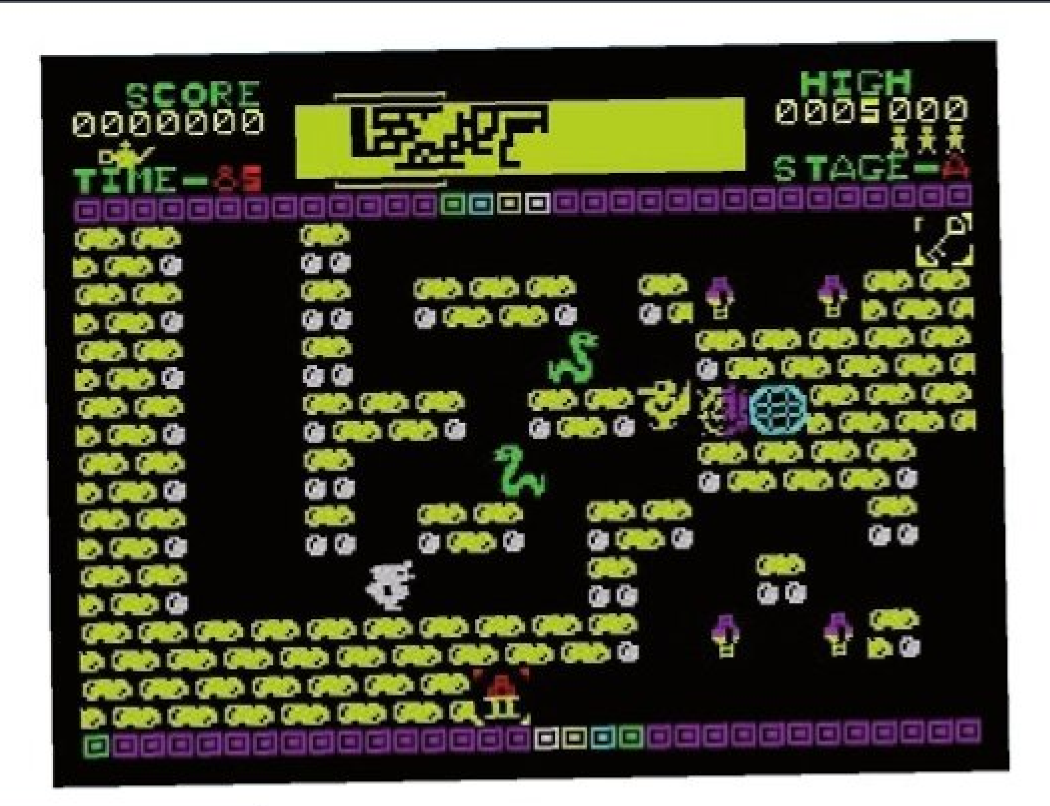
3. Kong
(Spectrum, 1983)

A further increase in boldness, now going so far as to steal part of the name of its victim, as well as cloning its classic gameplay amazingly poorly.

QUACKSHOT
■ (1985, Creative Sparks for Spectrum)

As IP owners tried to crack down on unofficial ports, some coders took a different approach to cloning. Rather than openly copying a game and giving it a name that was often only a single letter removed from that of the source material (*Pheenix*, *Galaxion*, etc), they'd swipe the game but give it a whole new 'skin' in the hopes that such a change would be enough to escape the lawyers' clutches.

For example, the Speccy's leading 'tribute' to Konami's 1982 tomb-raiding hit *Tutankham* had previously been Micromania's unsubtly titled *Tutankhamun*, but the wiser heads at Creative Sparks switched the setting from the resting place of the mummified Egyptian king to a clockwork toy factory full of wind-up ducks, while duplicating the actual gameplay slavishly. Oddly enough, despite the new storyline, *Quackshot* both played and looked far more like *Tutankham* than *Tutankhamun* had, copying the arcade game's level layouts almost to the last brick.



KOSMIC KANGA
■ (1984, Micromania for Spectrum/C64)

Micromania, meanwhile, had already cottoned on to this angle itself. Unknown to most gamers at the time – the *Crash* review described it as "entirely novel" and "totally original", while poor old *Big K* went with "following a handful of passable arcade conversions they've produced their own original game" – this strange skyscraper-leaping platformer was pretty much a direct copy of Rock-Ola's 1981 arcade release *Jump Bug*, except with that game's VW Beetle replaced with a giant kangaroo in a space helmet and boxing gloves. A bouncing kangaroo does make more sense than a bouncing car, to be honest.

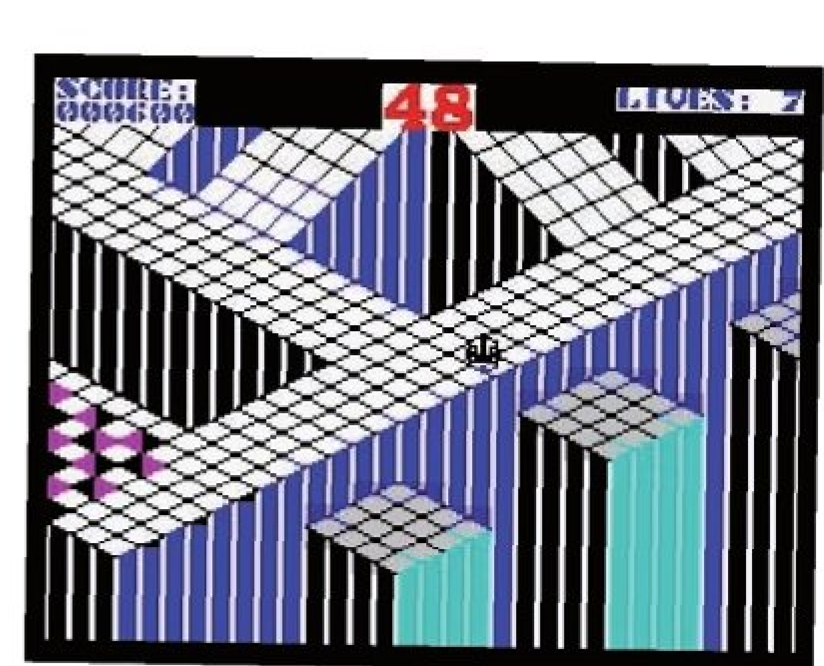
To be fair, *Kosmic Kanga* is reasonably different to *Jump Bug* in practice, if not in design. While a list of features for the two games would be all but indistinguishable from each other, trying to play them the same way will swiftly land you in trouble, thanks to distinct layouts and the controls working slightly differently. But still, it looks like you can fool all of the people, but only for a couple of decades.

3D STARSTRIKE
■ (1984, Realtime Games for Spectrum)

***3D Starstrike* actually** does something very much like *Kosmic Kanga*, albeit in some senses in the opposite way. Realtime never tried to hide the fact that it was aping Atari's hugely successful *Star Wars* coin-op, but the game it produced, while inarguably developed from the same blueprint as Atari's game, had a feel just different enough to be plausibly claimed as a tribute rather than a photocopy.

It's not an argument that can stand up to a huge amount of cross-examination, admittedly. The necessity of translating the coin-op's yoke controller to a keyboard is the mother of the distinctive steering technique, and the addition of a temperature gauge to your lasers is really just as much window-dressing as the little between-wave briefing cut-scenes. But still, *Starstrike* does feel noticeably grittier and more adult than *Star Wars*, and would probably have got away with it in court.





GYROSCOPE
■ (1985, Melbourne House for C64/Spectrum)

Extrapolating the thought processes behind *Kosmic Kanga* and *Starstrike* to a logical conclusion leads to a yet cleverer angle, namely to make a game that's actually only like a coin-op in a couple of very superficial ways, yet which will immediately be recognised and seized on by fans of it. Such was the flash of inspiration that came to Melbourne House in 1985, while gamers were still dazzled by Atari's trackball-controlled arcade wonder from the previous year, *Marble Madness*.

Gyroscope strips out almost every gameplay element from *Marble Madness*, leaving practically nothing but the bare landscape, yet punters still hungrily devoured its evocative and unique atmosphere, which Melbourne had rightly recognised as being far more central to the game's success than any particular play feature. Indeed, the Speccy and CBM versions of *Gyroscope* were little alike, with very different level layouts and enemies, but both felt like *Marble Madness* and that was what counted.



4. Kong Strikes Back
(C64/Spectrum, 1984)

The height of robbery, still taking the name of *Donkey Kong* but using it on a cheap knockoff of arcade title *Mr Do's Wild Ride*.



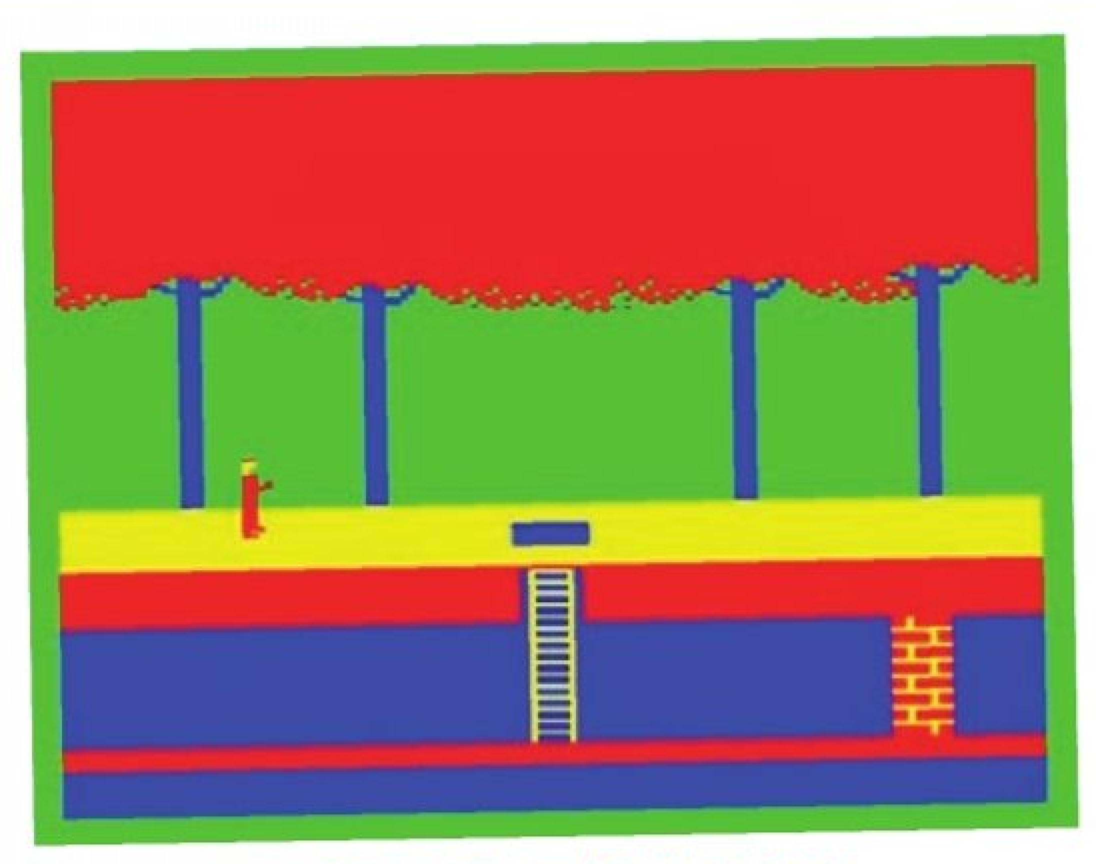
5. Mr Wimpy
(C64/Spectrum, 1984)

The first tentative move towards propriety. The game is still stolen, on this occasion from *Burger Time*, but at least the branding is legit.



6. Hunchback
(C64/Spectrum, 1984)

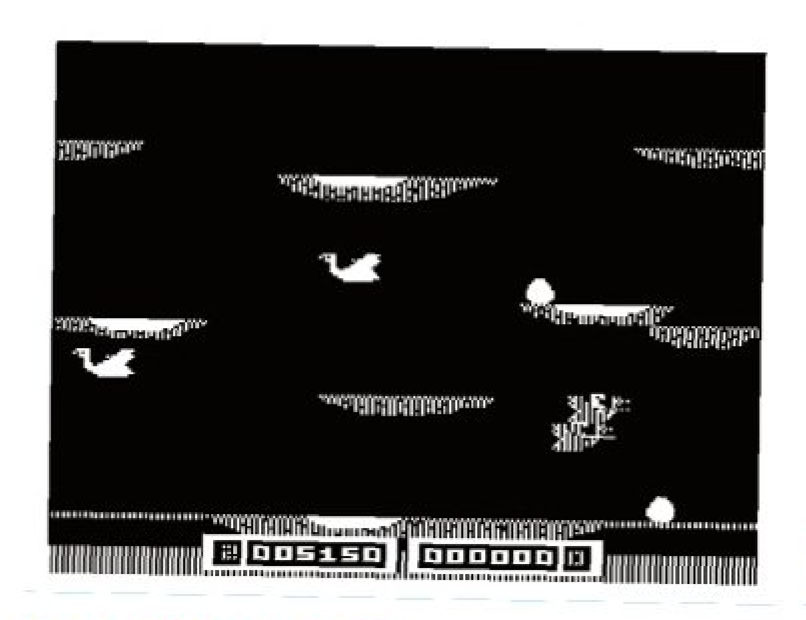
Ocean did a splendid job of bringing Quasimodo home, possibly because Century Electronics was supervising, and never looked back.



CUTHBERT IN THE JUNGLE
■ (1984, Microdeal for Dragon 32/C64)

Cheekier yet, of course, is to pinch a whole clutch of other people's games and brand them as your own series, turning them into a mascot for your own company and/or platform at the same time. Microdeal had already appropriated *Space Panic* (*Cuthbert Goes Digging*) and *Amidar* (*Cuthbert Goes Walkabout*) for the Dragon when it pulled off their most blatant steal yet, copying Activision's Atari VCS smash *Pitfall!* wholesale for Cuthbert's latest escapade.

It even had the nerve to port several *Cuthbert* games to the C64, where an official version of *Pitfall!* released in the same year had to fight for attention against the would-be usurper.



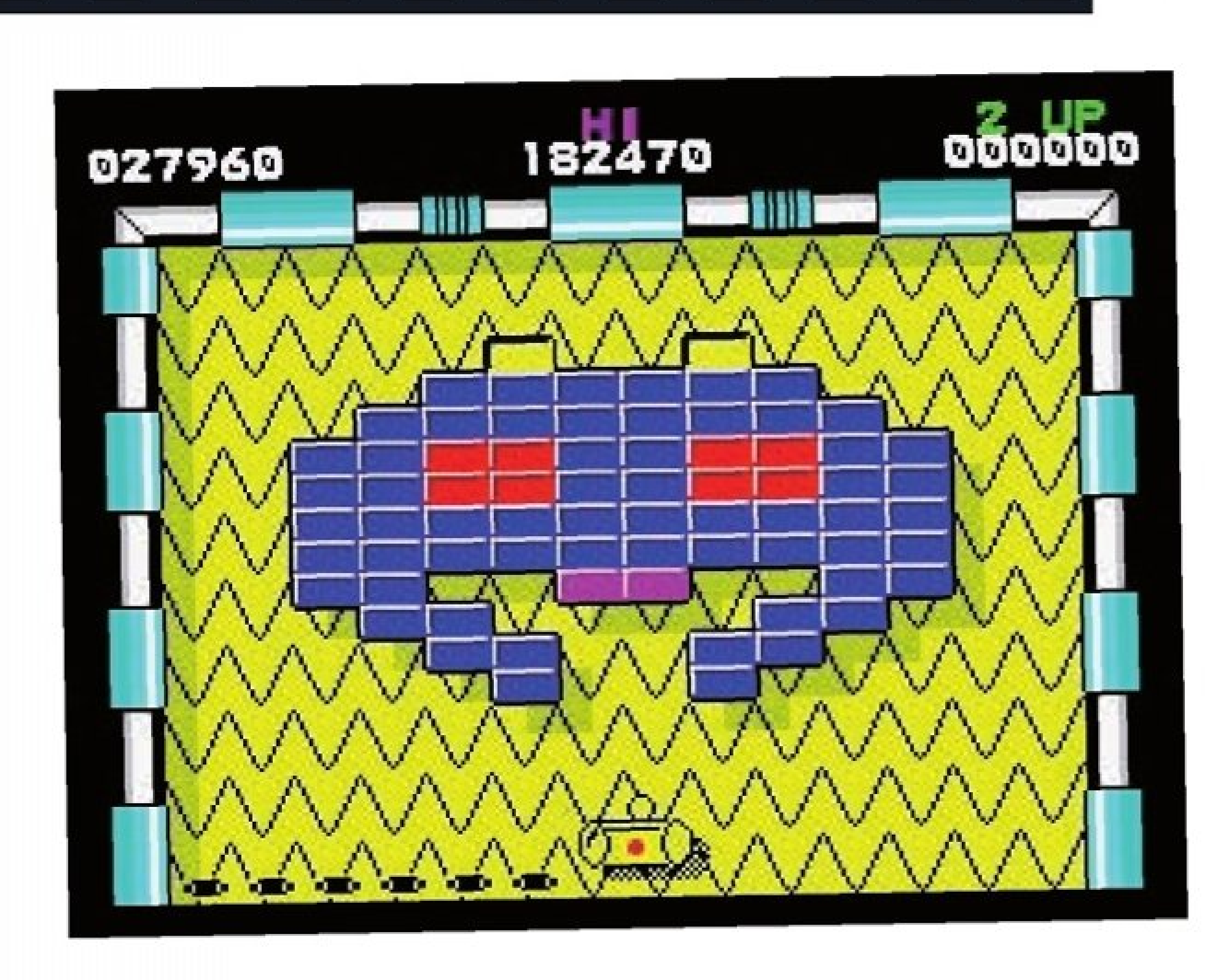


BUZZARD BAIT
■ (1984, Microdeal for Dragon 32)

Microdeal had one final bravura display of brass neck later the same year. *Buzzard Bait* was a superb copy of Williams' *Joust*, and the publisher was so proud of how well it had nicked someone else's game that it released it at twice the usual price, the increase being to pay for the security dongle that came with the cassette and plugged into the second joystick port, without which the game wouldn't run.

It takes some ice-cold nerves to huffily occupy the moral high ground over pirates doing to you what you're busily and flagrantly doing to someone else at the same time – the casual pirates weren't making money off it, either – and the dongle episode was not popular. After *Buzzard Bait*, the company moved away from arcade clones and started to focus on more original games like the marvellous *Time Bandit*, which was unmistakably inspired by *Tutankham* but built massively on it to produce one of the finest games **Retro Gamer** has never covered. Cough, cough.

> "It takes nerves to take the moral high ground over pirates doing to you what you're doing to someone else"



WIPE OUT
■ (1987, KB.RAM for Spectrum)

As the industry matured and publishers started protecting their IP – or, in the case of *Buzzard Bait*, other peoples' IP – more determinedly, some developers hurriedly backed away from their more blatant clones. One such victim was *Wipe Out*, which never got an official commercial release in its original form. It eventually morphed into the game better known as *Batty*, which debuted on a *Your Sinclair* cover tape and subsequently got a budget-label release, but the first version was a much more direct rip-off of Taito's seminal 1986 *Breakout* update *Arkanoid*, with level designs as close to the coin-op as the Speccy's resolution would allow.

Equipped with a new set of original levels and various gameplay tweaks, *Batty* went on to become a beloved Speccy stalwart and also got a radically different C64 conversion. By this time, however, official licences were already dominating the charts, and the attack of the clones was staggering, its forces decimated, towards its inevitable defeat.

Future Classic

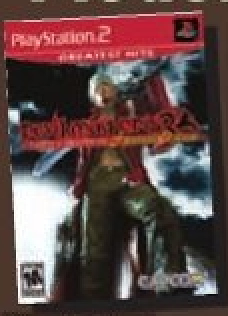
Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

retro GAMER

Devil May Cry 3 Special Edition

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

ATARI 5200 | LARRY DE MAR | DYNAMIX | THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT



INFO

- **Featured System:** PlayStation 2
- **Year Released:** 2005
- **Publisher:** Capcom
- **Developer:** In-house
- **Key People:** Hideaki Itsuno (Director) Tsuyoshi Tanaka (Producer) Tetsuya Shibata (Composer)

GO DEEPER

- ***Devil May Cry* creator Hideki Kamiya didn't return for any of the game's sequels, only working on the first instalment.**
- **Killing 100 enemies in the background of *DMC3*'s closing credits unlocks a secret, alternative ending.**



08. DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING

The original Devil May Cry gave us a template for modern hack-and-slash gameplay, but its third instalment brought us variety, finesse and ambition that saw Capcom at its very best

THE BACKGROUND

Following stiff reception of *Devil May Cry 2*, due to its off-key tone and moody characterisation of antihero Dante, Capcom was looking to get the series back on track. At the same time, however, the developers wanted to create a hack-and-slash title that had its own identity. In an interview with GameDaily, Capcom's director of marketing Tom Thorson summed up the company's approach to reigniting interest in the series. "With *Devil May Cry 2* they wanted to take the game in a different direction than the original, and the same with *Devil May Cry 3*… [the developers] came up with a compelling style system which really allows players to customise and define their own gameplay experience."

This mentality brought back the accomplished art direction and daft humour of the first instalment, but merged it with a full-featured, RPG-esque progression system that extended beyond simply buying more combos. With better-paced levels and an experimental range of new options presented to players, Capcom succeeded in its attempt to differentiate *Dante's Awakening* from both of the series' previous instalments. The story, too, brought the trilogy full circle in explaining the backstory between the rival brothers Dante and Vergil, touched upon in the first game. Reception of *Devil May Cry 3* was so positive that a Special Edition was released in 2006, a rare enhanced release from the Japanese publisher outside of its *Street Fighter* series.

THE GAME

The daft perfection of *Dante's Awakening* is encapsulated by its opening scene – Dante, having just set up his as-yet-nameless mercenary agency and enjoying a nice pizza, shirtless, is suddenly attacked by a group of demons, who impale him from all angles with scythes. Basically unscathed, the antihero begins to beat them with his fists, before tossing on his coat, whipping his sword and guns into action and clearing them out, punching the sound out of a jukebox, riding a fan and firing snooker balls

Things of note







The difficult second album

Following the pedestrian *Devil May Cry 2*, the pressure was on Capcom to deliver with the third instalment – luckily, the team found its feet for *Dante's Awakwning*.

Something Special

Devil May Cry 3's Special Edition let players take on the role of Vergil from the start, as well as offering lower difficulty settings and a budget price, opening it up to even more fans.

Bloody hell

If something positive emerged from *DMC2*'s legacy it was the Bloody Palace, which pits players against floors of enemies. With *DMC3*, Capcom perfected the idea.

Cameo appearances

Dante gets around – not long before *DMC3*, the character turned up in both Capcom's PS2 version of *Viewtiful Joe* and the superb *Shin Megami Tensei: Lucifer's Call*.

Never to be the same again

In *DMC4*, Capcom introduced new hero Nero and softened the series. Now, with a new developer for its next instalment, the series may never recapture the glory of *DMC3*.



» [PS2] The brothers' warring relationship is a silly story thread.



» [PS2] Dante is at his cockiest in *DMC3*, swinging around on stripper poles and performing other antics.

What the press thought



Play
Score: 92%
"A superb game and a fitting swansong for Dante on the PlayStation 2."



GamesTM
Score: 8/10
"While we've all seen two dozen enemies cluttering up the screen… *Dante's Awakening* does it properly."

at his foes along the way. He does all of this while finishing his pizza.

That brash, entertaining ridiculousness in *Devil May Cry 3*'s story and humour is one side of its appeal. The other is the absurdly wonderful nature of its combat, a hyper-stylised upscaling of the original *Devil May Cry*'s hack-and-slash paradigm, taking the bare bones and tossing in loads more ridiculous weapons, as well as greater opportunity for customisation. The game's four basic fighting styles – Gunslinger, Trickster, Swordmaster and Royal Guard (with two extra popping up later) – offer players the chance to adjust the makeup of the combat exactly to their method of play, rewarding them for it automatically through the game's organic progression system. This demonstrated the incredible versatility within the combat.

Perhaps the greatest triumph of *Devil May Cry 3* is the way the fighting empowers the player – the dynamism of the animation, not to mention the tremendously well-crafted controls, makes it one of the select few gaming experiences that operates 100 per cent hand-in-hand with your instincts, a necessity in the face of such punishing difficulty.

Once you've mastered the controls, it's simple and satisfying to bring even the most complicated moves to life on-screen – the combination of this intuitiveness and the behind-the-scenes progression means that overcoming the challenge of *DMC3* is its own reward, not merely an endurance test. Like last year's *Demon's Souls*, *Dante's Awakening* makes no apologies for being as difficult as it is.

The boss battles across the 20 levels are also some of Capcom's most imaginative ever, from the relentless assault of an ice-encrusted Cerberus early on in the game to the fiendish, time-jumping fight with Geryon the Timesteed.

You die a lot. But, starting again after battling past the closing credits shows you just how much has been learned. Bosses that took five attempts and an hour to best are roundly trashed in the space of five minutes, due to your mastery of whatever style of play you pursued the first time around. This kind of skill-based replay value is near endless for anyone who wants to master every style and earn all the combos the game has to offer. You will feel superior.

Why it's a future classic

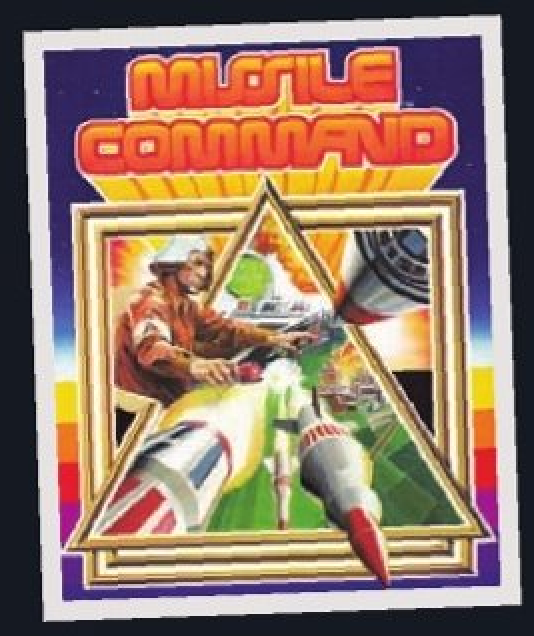
Devil May Cry 3's combination of style and hack-and-slash finesse will likely never be matched by modern day Capcom, which has ham-fistedly targeted the Western market this generation and let *DMC* wither on the side with a confused fourth instalment. *Dante's Awakening* is a high point of hack-and-slash play that remains one of the most responsive and cathartic videogames ever made.

Despite its difficulty, *Devil May Cry 3*'s fair learning curve always gives new players something to aspire to, introducing extra weapons and harder enemies at just the right points in the experience.

It's the personality of this third instalment that drives us to push onwards and master the ins and outs of its complex hack-and-slash kinetics, though – the daft chap in a red coat who uses a motorcycle as a weapon, the near-ludicrous rock soundtrack and the tongue-in-cheek dialogue lend *Devil May Cry* a unique identity that Capcom once applied to most of its productions.

MISSILE COMMAND

Vivid nightmares, errant missiles and living under the threat of nuclear war were just a few of the obstacles that Dave Theurer and Rich Adam faced while creating Missile Command. Darran Jones investigates further…



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **DEVELOPER:** DAVE THEURER
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1980
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

Dave Theurer is not an easy man to get hold of. The genius behind such arcade delights as *Tempest*, *I, Robot* and *Missile Command* is fiercely protective of his private life; so much so, in fact, that it's taken eight long years of gentle coercion and downright pleading for him to finally commit to an interview about one of the industry's most iconic games.

Still, when you consider the sheer pedigree of Dave's title, the long wait has definitely been worth it, with the precise controls and intense pressure the game offers remaining just as refreshing today as the first time you dropped 10 pence into it.

One of the most interesting facts about *Missile Command* is that while the gameplay mechanics are all Dave's, the concept itself actually came from higher up within Atari. "I remember my manager, Steve Calfee, told me to create a missile defence game wherein the player would defend against incoming missiles, which could be seen on a radar display," confirms Dave when we quizzed him about *Missile Command*'s origins. "We took it from there, tossed out the radar screen and added cities, missile bases and so on."

It's a somewhat inauspicious start for one of the most iconic games of the Eighties, but with the constant threat of the USSR and nuclear war being high on the agenda, it's hardly a surprise that the concept had germinated in the mind of Atari (coin-op) president Gene Lipkin.

The bleak link became even more obvious when names were being thrown about for the new project, with *Missile Command* being just one of the possible choices. "Some of the names I recall included *Missile Command*, *Ground Zero*, *The End* and *Armageddon*," continues Dave. "There were various pro and con reasons given for each name suggestion, but recognition was a key concern. Lots of people don't know the meaning of 'Ground Zero' and 'Armageddon'. I don't recall being too bleak as a factor. As I recall, Gene Lipkin suggested the name *Missile Command*. There was a general consensus that that was a really good name, so we went with it."

While the concept itself had been born from the Cold War threat, Dave didn't want to use *Missile Command* as an excuse to glorify something that, at the time, was considered a very real threat. "I wanted people to become aware of the horrors of a nuclear war. I didn't want to put players in the position of nuking entire cities, as entertainment, because it would desensitise them from such horrors," he explains. "However, a defensive position was



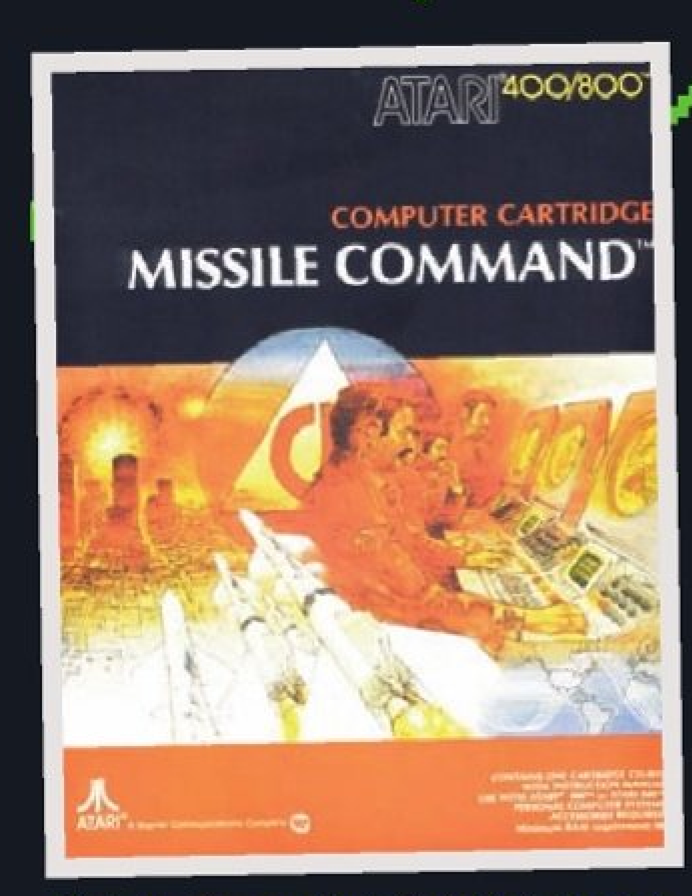




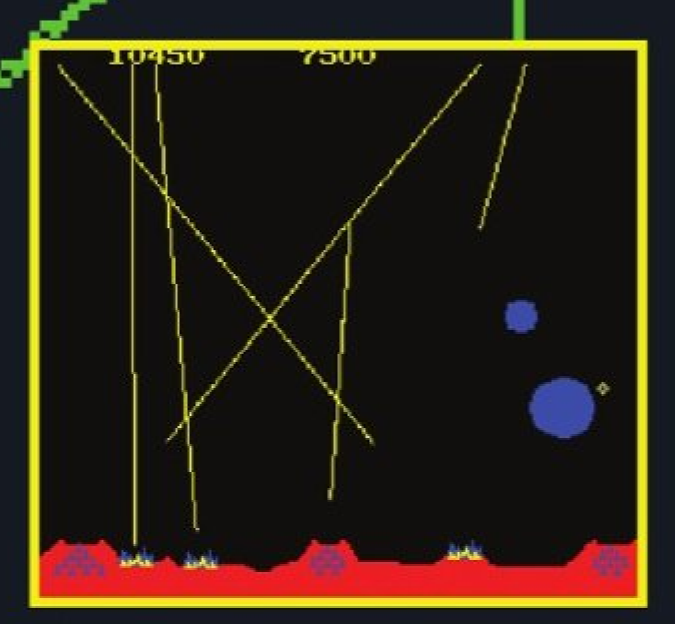








» The instruction manual for the Atari 8-bit. You just don't get artwork that looks like this anymore…


» [Arcade] Getting missiles to swerve around your explosions was one of the development challenges.

acceptable, since what's nobler than saving 10 million people from annihilation? The final lesson, though, is that nobody wins in a nuclear war, and that's why we have 'THE END' explode to fill the screen, after all the cities are gone."

It's something that Rich Adam, *Missile Command*'s junior programmer, also touched upon when we asked him about the potential controversy that *Missile Command* might have attracted at the time. "I didn't feel as strongly as Dave, but I certainly did not want to go into something that would simulate a true, aggressive World War III scenario," he begins. "We touched on it to a point, but our concept was always [that] we're blowing up pixels. It's an abstract, conceptual game. It was certainly in our collective minds, but it was not something that dissuaded us or diverted us from trying to make something fun."

Despite the general concerns that were connected to *Missile Command*, Dave, Rich and the rest of the team remained resolutely excited about the project. After all, this was the beginning of the videogame industry, and it was an incredibly exciting time for everyone involved.

"During the first few years, we felt like pioneers," recalls Dave with an obvious sense of pride. "There weren't many [video] arcade companies at the time. There weren't many game development tools either. We had to develop most of them in-house. I'm not sure we thought about it that much, though. Mostly we just thought about how we could make our games more fun to play."

It's a sentiment that Rich wholeheartedly agrees with: "It was an outstanding environment to work in and we were lucky because we were filling the void. Every idea was fresh and new and hadn't been tried before, and that was really fun. Nowadays it's very hard to come up with something novel and different."

"I didn't want to put players in the position of nuking cities as entertainment"

As with many of Atari's games, *Missile Command* was built from the ground up, meaning that Dave and the rest of the team didn't have the benefit of using an existing engine, something that is commonplace in today's industry.

"You were always bringing out new hardware in that day and age," explains Rich, "so that was one of the key difficulties faced with new projects." The constant creation of new custom-built technology also meant that there was a strong relationship between Dave and the rest of the hardware team while *Missile Command* was being created.

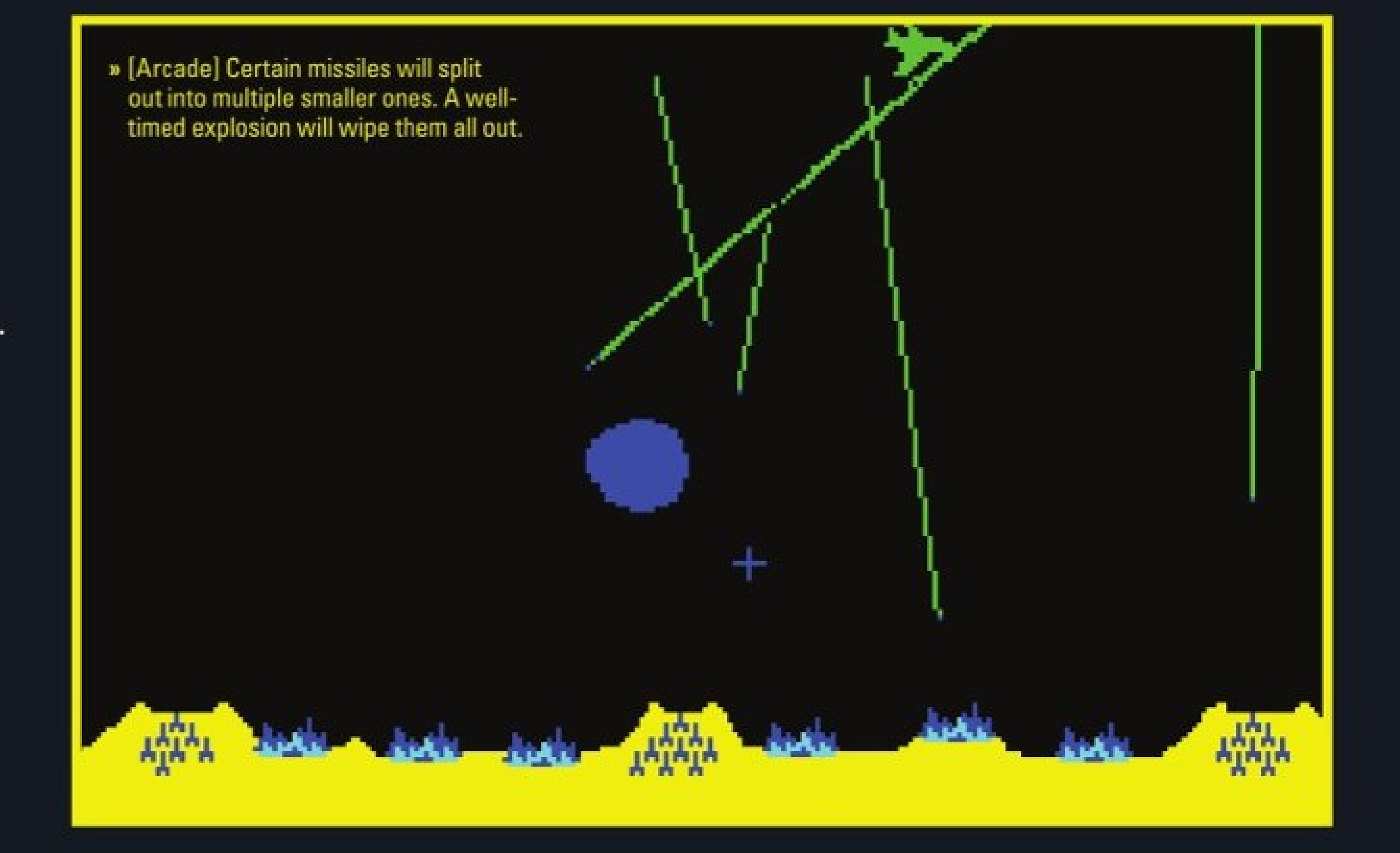
"The hardware designer designed the custom hardware just for this game," explains Dave about *Missile Command*'s early development. "He knew that the bottom portion of the screen needed more colours for the cities, bases, land, etc. No other game, except for a possible sequel, was planned for this hardware. The hardware designer, Dave Sherman, was excellent, and quickly came up with a design, which was wire-wrapped for development purposes."

It was at this point that we were keen to find out if any other system other than a trackball had been considered when *Missile Command* was first pitched. "My recollection is that it was going to be a trackball from the start and it never deviated from that," confirms Rich. "From the moment we implemented it, it was pretty obvious that the trackball was optimum."

"We were using trackballs in a lot of our other games at the time such as *Soccer* and *Football* before *Missile Command*," continues Dave. "It seemed like a good match, so a trackball was planned from the very beginning."

While the trackball easily made the transition from prototype to final games, other aspects of *Missile Command* weren't quite as lucky, with numerous ideas being dropped during the game's six-month development. "When I was first creating the coastline you were defending, I pathetically tried to create a Californian-looking coast that turned out to be awful-looking," recalls Rich. "Lyle [Rains] was the one who eventually came up with the fortress-looking cities that you had to defend."

The ability to blow up real-world cities, even if they were depicted by simple pixels, was soon ditched, which in turn helped distance the game from any possible real-life connections. There were plenty of other ideas that were tested, but they


» [Arcade] Certain missiles will split out into multiple smaller ones. A well-timed explosion will wipe them all out.

A word from Lyle Rains

WE MANAGED TO speak to Atari's former senior executive about the popularity of *Missile Command*, and here's what he told us.

"Dave Theurer, as was also the case with *Tempest*, did a fantastic job of tuning the pacing of the game and making the controls responsive.

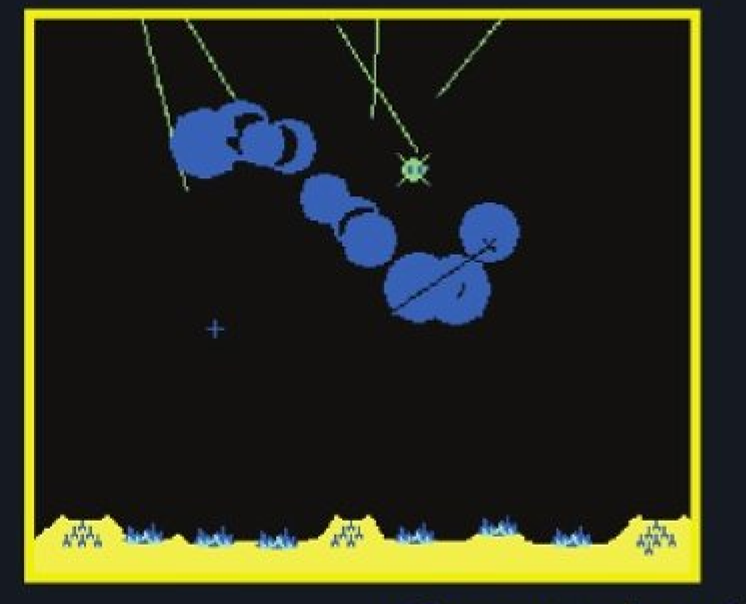
"Atari certainly did not shy away from battle simulations in our products, although we avoided direct bloody violence on human avatars and mobiles for about two decades. But the world in 1981 was still involved in the Cold War. The idea of nuclear holocaust on cities added an extra edginess to *Missile Command* that resonated with some folks as being a bit too close to home. One could speculate that, as part of the popular culture of the Eighties, *Missile Command* even had some subliminal influence on defence policy-makers, as they contemplated the so-called 'Star Wars' missile defence system. If they had actually played the game, they would have known that you always ending up losing."








The Making Of ... MISSILE COMMAND





» There was assorted memorabilia created for *Missile Command*, including an album, a collector's pin and even an audiobook set.



too quickly fell by the wayside. Dave reveals some of the other ideas that were implemented and goes on to explain why they were eventually ignored: "Submarines would pop up and shoot missiles, which didn't make sense, as every other threat was coming from the sky. Railroads hauled missiles between the cities and the bases, but it [was deemed] too complicated for players. There were programmable names for the cities, which made it more relevant for players in areas near the named cities, but less relevant for players out of the area, but it was too much work for operators to program in the cities' names. There was also a giant physical display above the monitor containing flashing lights, status indicators and other elements. It was too expensive, too hard to maintain – light bulbs too hard to replace – and too hard to play the game and watch this external display."

In addition to numerous gameplay changes, *Missile Command* presented plenty of technical challenges for the developers, many of which were being encountered for the very first time. "The entire program had to fit into approximately 12K and it was written in assembly language," recalls Dave. "We also had to come up with lightning-fast methods for drawing lines and circles in real-time so that motion would be smooth, and we were constantly working within the limits of the hardware: the narrow bottom section at the bottom of the screen for land, cities and missile bases had more colours than the rest of the screen."

Rich remembers how the large number of on-screen missiles and smart bombs that the game had to handle also ended up proving to be a problem for the trailblazing pioneers: "Dealing with the new hardware and making sure that it was up and running and good to go was hard enough, but in terms of development, creative and fun factor it was probably those smart bombs." He continues: "It was just their behaviour. I think a lot of what they did was targeted to a specific city, but they avoided and tried to go around and would use colour detect in their near region to decide if they were going to plough into a bomb or an explosion area. In that day and age we were trailblazing, but in today's world they are now trivial problems. Getting them to do the right thing and behave intelligently had less to do with time on screen and more to do with the avoidance of getting blown up."

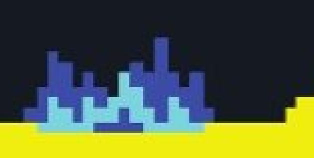
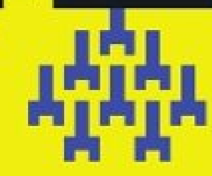
Despite various kinks, Rich feels that the creation of *Missile Command* remained a fairly organic experience for the most part. "We did the original incoming missiles and that was cool but not enough, and so we added the satellites and the planes



» [Arcade] The trackball was essential to mastery of *Missile Command*. A joystick would never allow you to deflect speeding incoming missiles on later stages.







» Dave kindly supplied us with this image of the original top that was considered for *Missile Command*. The expense and maintenance of the lights coupled with the distraction it caused meant it was quickly dropped from the final game.

» [Arcade] Dave was keen that *Missile Command* didn't glorify nuclear war, using the end screen to explain that, in such a circumstance, everyone loses.

and the things that dropped them. That was more and better but maybe not quite enough, and so we added MIRV missiles, and that was more and better but not quite enough, and then we added smart bombs and that turned out to be enough. And that's really the kind of evolution of how games are created. You take the core of what you're doing, you make that and see if it fits. It was such a simple concept, and the additions that we made were so simple, that it became one of those games were everything kind of fell into place."

With a prototype finished, it was time to put *Missile Command* on its all-important field test. This was a crucial time for any new game, as the amount of coinage that was pulled in would always decide if there was any point in finishing the project. Even before the field test, though, Dave was convinced that they had a hit on their hands: "I'd be asking co-workers to step back from playing the development prototype so I could work on it," he recalls. "That's when we knew that the game would be a winner."

Rich was also pleased with the field test, and, like Dave, he was convinced that they stood a far better chance than other games. "You have to realise that this was one of the first colour games, so it had this gigantic advantage over all its competition," he begins. "I remember some young guy who was probably in the military. He was looking at the game and he had simplified technology into thinking that everything was simply a new chip. He had this unabashed excitement and enthusiasm and was like, 'Oh, man. Look what's in that new chip!' His reaction on test was basically saying: 'Look what technology is bringing to me.'"

"Dave Theurer suffered from regular nightmares about nuclear attack for several months"

After its successful field test, *Missile Command* rolled out into arcades, quickly going on to become a massive success for Atari; although the game's gruelling schedule did leave its mark on Dave, who suffered from regular nightmares about nuclear attack for several months during and after the game's development. Despite those nightmares, Dave remains incredibly proud of his work on the game. "I had a very strong feeling from the very first day when Steve Calfee gave me the assignment to do a missile defence game that the game would be one people would want to play," he admits. "We saw co-workers' excitement with it when they came into the lab to play it during development. We had developers from the Atari VCS system that would drop by – they were in the same building – and play it for hours in our lab. We saw the players' excitement when we put it out on its first field test. We saw great collections in all the field tests. It was a very positive experience from start to finish."

Rich is also pleased with the way the game turned out, citing the power it gave you as one of the reasons for its enduring success. "It's a good feeling to have total control over an incredibly complex machine," he explains. "To have a machine give you that ego gratification of controlling such a complex piece of equipment for a quarter is a hell of a bargain. People crave power and ego is fed by that, so that's what we were selling and, to a degree, what videogames continue to sell."

Special thanks to Dave Theurer and Rich Adam for their precious time, Martin Goldberg for additional advice and pictures, and to Paul Drury for making an eight-year quest finally come to fruition.

Incoming missiles. Abort, abort

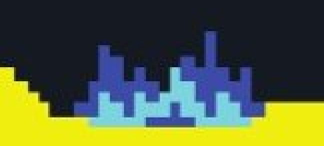
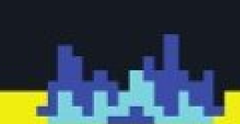
MISSILE COMMAND WAS a huge success for Atari, so it should come as no surprise to learn that a sequel was soon in development after the original's runaway success. Having cut his teeth on the original game, it was Rich's turn to shine as the game's creator. Unfortunately for him, the original sequel hit a number of key issues, meaning it never reached the arcades, a pity, as his description of it fills us with excitement at what might have been.

"It was simultaneously two player," he begins about the now long-dead sequel. "We turned the monitor on its side and tried to get a two-player version of the game up and running, where you attacked each other. It was a really challenging concept, but it just wasn't as fun to multitask – at least I couldn't get it to be fun – and try and go over and launch accurate missiles at opponents, while playing defensively against launches from another player.

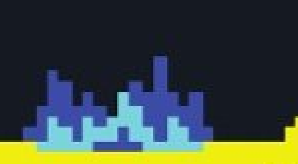
"I think the main issue with *Missile Command 2* was that the computer launches could be way more efficient and rapid about laying down missile launches, as opposed to humans who had to manipulate the trackball. In that sense it was difficult, and people were so satisfied with the way that the mechanic of *Missile Command* worked that it just didn't do much. I never solved the design for using two players simultaneously, and I just could not make it fun. The screen real estate was another issue, as you actually had a smaller, narrower area to defend. That was my game and we eventually killed it because it just didn't earn. When you started a project you knew that there was a 50 per cent chance that it was never going to get to production. It was a really competitive environment, though, and I wanted to make something really cool. I wanted to have the next big hit game for us."

Sadly, with *Missile Command 2*, it just wasn't to be.








THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





IN DEPTH

» The game features some interesting bosses and enemies to duff up. One minute you're fighting Pinocchio and his dad; the next you're trading blows with Teen Wolf.

» As well as funny enemies, *Night Slashers* features hilariously bad digitised speech. We can't do them justice in writing, but we'll try: just imagine Radioactive Man saying: "Time to clean up" and "Delicious."

» The presentation throughout *Night Slashers* is impressive. As you can see by following this line here, defeated enemies decompose before your very eyes.

NIGHT SLASHERS

■ **Developer:** Data East ■ **Year:** 1994 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **If you only have time to play one unconverted title this month, make sure it's this one right here. How *Night Slashers* has never come to our attention until now is still a little mystifying to us, as it is without a doubt the silliest side-scrolling fighter we've come across in a long time – and that's saying something when we've featured *Guardians Of The 'Hood*.**

Presented like *Final Fight* but with a schlock horror theme, the gist of the game's story goes something like this: three months after the world gets overrun by the walking dead, and the occasional werewolf, mutant and vampire, the most improbable trio of heroes ever drawn together – an orange-suited butler, a ninja and a blond glam rocker with robot arms – decide that enough is enough and so venture out into the city to clean it up and get to the bottom of why the dead simply aren't staying that way.

This horror theme is certainly the most original aspect of *Night Slashers* and is where most of the game's charm is found, because the gameplay has been seen dozens of times before. Each fighter has their own move repertoire, including a dash attack, a special attack that lops off a bit of your character's health, and punches and kicks that can be strung together. And in addition to all that, they also have a couple of grapple moves, with the punch button actuating a pavement smash move when you have an enemy in your grip and the kick button throwing your assailant into the path of other enemies.

The presentation and animation of *Night Slashers* is very slick, with enemies nicely decomposing into skeletons and puddles of skin rather than flashing for a bit and disappearing. Actually, it's the enemies that provide one of the biggest draws in the game. Whether it's a psychotic surgeon who is wheeled into shot while he makes a bloody mess of a cadaver, or battling Frankenstein's monster, most of them are sure to bring a smile to your face. Our personal favourite, though, has to be the sinister-looking puppet master, who attacks you with his blue-headed marionette.

Night Slashers is an entertaining Unconverted that is certainly deserving of a play. Why it was never brought home remains a mystery, but it might have something to do with the gameplay's similarities to the genre's big hitters.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ZOMBIE REVENGE 1999

House Of The Dead spin-off *Zombie Revenge* is probably *Night Slashers*' closest contemporary. It, too, is a side-scrolling brawler that stars three larger-than-life heroes and is cheesier than those Activia adverts starring the ghost of the late Tiffany Mitchell.

HARD HEAD

■ **Developer:** SunA Electronics ■ **Year:** 1988 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up


» [Arcade] *Hard Head* is baffling in places, randomly mixing elements of other games with pure oddness.

■ ***Hard Head* is** a peculiar little platformer from one of Korea's first arcade manufacturers, SunA, and plays like a hodgepodge of classic games. Sadly, it doesn't come close to touching the class of any of them, although it is fun.

While the story is a little confusing, in the game you appear to assume the role of a man in a romper suit who is trying to impress his lady. The look of the game can best be described as colourfully ugly, and while the gameplay cribs a lot from the genre's leading lights like *Super Mario Bros* – head-stomping enemies and butting blocks from below to release pick-ups – and *Bubble Bobble* – your character is armed with a gun that amiably encases enemies in a bubble, rendering them harmless – there are some nice ideas on show with the level design.

The game can be played by two players simultaneously, allowing the characters to use each other's head as a springboard, and at the end of each stage you are, bizarrely, given the chance to kick a football into a goal to earn bonus points. There were a few other quite charming and notable aspects, but we're short of words and we thought it would be nice to let you discover them.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

KARNOV 1987

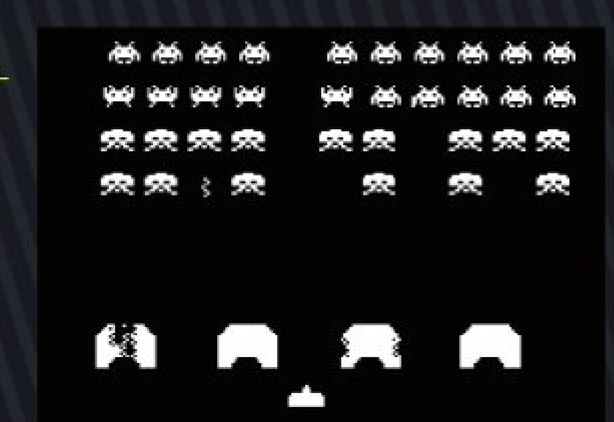
We went with Data East's baby-eating mascot's self-titled videogame in the end. It has a similar-looking hero, mixes platforming with shooting and also has a strong sense of absurdity to it. *Karnov* was ported to quite a few machines in its day.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SPACE INVADERS 1978

We were in two minds whether to opt for *Missile Command*, owing to the similar theme, or *Space Invaders* because *Red Alert*'s gameplay is closer in feel to that game. In the end we opted for the latter as it was the most ported. Just about.



RED ALERT

■ **Developer:** Irem ■ **Year:** 1981 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] We wonder what *Red Alert*'s unnamed rogue state could represent…

■ ***Red Alert* sees** you steer a mobile AA gun to protect various countries that are under attack by a rogue state. Starting in France, each mission is split into three stages and all must be completed within a certain time. Failure to destroy the required number of enemies in that time results in a nuclear weapon getting launched over the city. Luckily, the missiles can be destroyed, although doing so takes true grit, as they split into several projectiles and all must be shot down quickly, as if any land on the city it's instant game over.

Helping add a bit of variety into what is essentially a more grounded version of *Space Invaders* are the three stages in the game. The first sees you destroying a phalanx of jet fighters as they release destroyable salvos onto the city. The second finds players taking out a wave of attack choppers and bombs dropped via parachutes. But the best stage is the last, as it sees you trying to destroy more aircraft as they attack the city by night. With only two swaying spotlights offering visibility of the night sky, it's tricky to see your targets and makes for a really tense final stand. *Red Alert* is *Space Invaders* meets *Missile Command*, and if you're a fan of either game we urge you to check out this early shooter from Irem.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

VIOLENCE FIGHT

■ **Developer:** Taito ■ **Year:** 1989 ■ **Genre:** Fighting

■ **The brilliantly titled** *Violence Fight* from Taito is basically an even more terrible version of *Pit-Fighter*. In it you make your selection between four forgettable fighters: fat man, martial arts stereotype man, all-American tough guy man and Mr T rip-off man. The story, seemingly knocked up in a tea break, is this: sometime in the Fifties an organised fight club known as Violence Fight is proving very popular among "Mafia, reckless drivers and businessmen", and the game's main hero, a chap called Bat Blue, is hoping to be crowned top "quarreller". Like *Pit-Fighter*, fights are arena-based and see two fighters encircling each other like moth impersonators while trying to awkwardly connect punches, for which the game hilarious flashes up words like 'BAGOON!'. The graphics are big and bright, but the combat is lightweight and the locations bland. One actually takes place on a bit of pipe – a strange place to hold a spectator sport, even an illegal one.





Cave Story

Joachim Hesse spoke to the most renowned developer in the shmup scene. We are, of course, talking about Cave, the legendary studio from Shinjuku, Tokyo. Fasten your seatbelts and get your trigger fingers ready...

For fans of shoot-'em-ups today, there's really only one developer to turn to for the best that the modern genre has to offer. That company is called Cave, and it is one of the last studios still creating high-end shmups. The 150 men and women working there created classics like *Dodonpachi, Mushihime-sama* and *Ketsui,* and those games are already legendary. The company's loyal fan base is willing to pay a fortune, even for the company's merchandise. And with new games in the pipeline, it's a good reason to spotlight this group of enthusiasts.

If you have ever played Cave's first game, *Donpachi*, you might have recognised a secret message hidden in the default high score table. If you read vertically, the initials will form the words 'TOAPLAN.FOREVER', one of several nods in the game towards a Japanese enterprise called Toaplan. And there is indeed a connection. Toaplan was formed in 1984, and the studio developed some decent arcade games. Most of them were difficult vertical shmups like *Tiger Heli, Flying Shark* and *Truxton.* If you've been playing shoot-'em-ups for any length of time, you've probably heard of at least one of them, as they have been converted for several home computers and consoles. Sadly, Toaplan faced bankruptcy in early 1994, with fighting games like Capcom's *Street Fighter II* and SNK's *Fatal Fury 2* being a real epidemic in arcades for which Toaplan didn't have the cure.

Happy birthday

While other employees left Toaplan for companies like Tamsoft, Taito or Square, Kenichi Takano founded a new game enterprise named Cave. "In the game industry at the time, there was a next-generation system boom starting with the Sony PlayStation and the Sega Saturn," recalls Tsuneki Ikeda, the current head

» [Arcade] You can find strange level bosses in Cave games, especially in the ridiculously over-the-top *Pink Sweets*.





» The collection of **Retro Gamer** freelancer Joachim Hesse. Most Cave releases for the home market are produced for Japan only.

programmer of Cave. "As I understand it, our CEO, Kenichi Takano, looked at that as a business opportunity and decided to found Cave."

15 June 1994 is the official date of birth of the company, which would later go on to become the developer of some of the most terrific shooting games ever. A few of the former Toaplan staff started to work for the studio, one of whom was Tsuneki Ikeda, a programmer on *Grind Stormer* and *Batsugun*, the last shoot-'em-ups to ever be released by Toaplan.

"When the company was founded, we had two members of staff who you could call veterans, and the other members were basically new to the industry with one or two years of experience," remembers Ikeda while talking to **Retro Gamer**. "In fact, the structure resulted in there being only one person on the team with real experience in creating shooting games."

Times have changed since then. Today, Ikeda is very likely the best-known Cave employee, and a kind of messiah for many shoot-'em-up disciples. He is the mastermind who brought us games like *Dodonpachi*, *Espgaluda* and other Cave classics, and he and his team popularised a new sub-genre called 'danmaku' (bullet curtain), better known as 'bullet hell' or 'maniac' shooters, which are defined by their overwhelming numbers of enemy projectiles.



» [Arcade] The high score table of Cave's first game, *Donpachi*. Can you find the hidden message?

In hell

Toaplan's *Batsugun* is generally considered the first danmaku game, but the genre wasn't established until *Donpachi* and its successor, *Dodonpachi*, showed up. *Donpachi* represents the rise of Tsuneki Ikeda, the visionary behind decisions like shrinking the hit boxes of the player's ship and implementing deeper scoring tactics. Today bullet patterns and combo systems are commonplace, but back in 1995 when *Donpachi* was released, they weren't.

"With our first title, *Donpachi*, we wanted to put that 'Toaplan' feel out in front, and really you didn't see much in the way of what you would call a 'danmaku'," explains Ikeda. "The next game, *Dodonpachi*, was a title designed fully conscious of the danmaku, and was based on basic rules like 'slow down the bullets', 'fire lots of bullets', 'fire bullets in uniform and direct lines'." That's all there is to it. It's not really magic, but it contains the heart and soul to push players to their limits, and it gives the company the power to survive.

While other former well-known shmup developers like Raizing, Psikyo or Seibu have disappeared, Cave is still in business. "I do believe it's important to keep releasing shooters

"I hope that other studios keep releasing shooters so that Cave doesn't wind up as a last bastion"

and I want to do so as long as we can," confesses Ikeda. "If anything, I hope that other companies continue to release shooters so that Cave doesn't wind up as a last bastion."

Cave has developed more than 30 games over the years, many of them considered classics of the shoot-'em-up genre. If you love 2D graphics and your tastes stretch from straightforward concepts like flying an aircraft on screen to weaving a fantasy warrior or a Lolita-like character through an ocean full of bullets, you can't ignore Cave. Games like *Dodonpachi Dai Ou Jou*, *Mushihime-sama Futari*, *Ibara* or *Deathsmiles*, to name just a few, mark the current standard of gameplay evolution in the genre. Cave remains in the vanguard after gathering talented people like Tsuneki Ikeda, Shinobu Yagawa (*Battle Garegga*, *Pink Sweets*) or Takashi Ichimura (*Deathsmiles*, *Ketsui*) from across the industry in one office. Even if you don't like the style and if you're partial to the formative, old-school gameplay mechanics of shmups like *R-Type* or *Raiden*, there's no denying that Cave's games are sophisticated and steeped in love of detail.

The future is now

Thankfully, there is no end in sight. Sure, arcades are moribund all around the world, but Cave is currently experimenting with other sources of income. Due to producer Makoto Asada, you already have access to a nice back catalogue of past Cave arcade games on the Xbox 360, with the company currently watching the performance of *Guwange* for Xbox Live Arcade, its first download-only release. That game's sales will decide whether the 360 port of *Dangun Feveron* will get a disc or download release.

But Cave isn't throwing its eggs in one basket with its 360 ports. Its iPhone games are selling well, having released three acclaimed ports on the App Store since April 2010 – *Espgaluda II*, *Dodonpachi Resurrection* and *Mushihime-sama Bug Panic* – and with an iOS version of *Deathsmiles* in the pipeline. These games are rather cheap to produce and make good money, so maybe the iPhone and its stablemates will save Cave from the same fate as Toaplan 17 years ago. Maybe the iPhone and its future equivalent are the next arcades. Time will tell.



» When connected to an arcade cabinet, these unassuming printed circuit boards will come to glorious life.

Five to play

Most Cave games have already assumed their place in shmup history, and to choose only five of them is like asking a mother which is her favourite child.

Guwange (1999)

■ The oldest game in our list has got an unusual gameplay mechanic. Set in the Muromachi period of Japanese history, you control your character and its shikigami – a kind of drone. While your character walks through the level and has to circumvent basic obstacles like fences, walls and brooks, the shikigami can fly over the screen, changing the direction of your shots and picking up coins from defeated foes for points. Good players can collect coins through the whole game, and if you can't keep up a constant flow of currency, your coin counter will be reset to zero. Hard, but fair.





Dodonpachi Dai Ou Jou (2002)

■ Some games, like *Dodonpachi Dai Ou Jou*, seem to be more work than play. But to think of Cave without thinking about a *Dodonpachi* game is nearly impossible. With *Dodonpachi*, Cave invented its most famous entry in the bullet hell sub-genre. To master *Dai Ou Jou*, you have to know every single attacking formation, and the key to attaining a high score is to kill the enemies constantly – don't wait too long before blasting the next one or your chain is broken. You can chain the whole game like this. It's ultra hard but very satisfying if you finally manage it.



Ketsui (2003)

■ Some shmup fans consider *Ketsui* to be the best game ever, but even so, there are not many players out there who managed to see its true final boss. To survive it once or even to reach the second or third loop of the game is one of gaming's most difficult challenges. If you are looking for serious points, you have to destroy the enemy tanks and planes at close range. The aggressive music perfectly matches the gameplay, too. "Approach your target and attack! Your mission starts now," says the game. "Are you ready?"



Mushihime-sama Futari (2006)

■ Along with *Espgaluda*, *Futari* is a good place to start playing Cave games, with only moderate difficulty on the 360 version's novice mode. The bullet patterns are frequently beautiful, like a sunrise on the beach of a Caribbean island – a beach with prehistoric monsters and giant insects! To really climb the leaderboard while blasting away the evil forces of Queen Larsa, you have to switch between your primary and secondary shot, with the colour of your multiplier indicating which weapon system you should use.



Deathsmiles (2007)

■ Cave has not made many horizontal shmups: after making *Progear* for Capcom in 2001, *Deathsmiles* was its first in six years, but it was a blast! The background screens remind us of animated comic books, and the music could be ripped from a *Castlevania* game. The strange bosses also deserve mention, like the giant mutant cow and the rock-spewing face, but the scoring system isn't as strong as other Cave games. It's a good omen for the future though, as *Deathsmiles* is the first Cave shooter to receive a retail console release in Europe.



» [Xbox 360] *Akai Katana* is heading to Xbox 360 in Japan in upgraded form as *Akai Katana Shin*.

Cave speak!

Tsuneki Ikeda and **Makoto Asada** are two of the key figures at Cave. They don't often speak to the Western media, and we are very happy that they made an exception in giving Retro Gamer this exclusive interview

Retro Gamer: After over 15 years at the top, is Cave still the same company as it was in the old days?
Makoto Asada: Cave was founded in 1994 when the arcade industry was in a stronger position. Over the years, Cave has added other, different types of businesses such as mobile games, online and social games, but the core direction of the company has been consistent, I would say.

RG: The company started with some former Toaplan employees. What are Tsuneki Ikeda, Kenichi Takano, Naoki Ogiwara, Toshiaki Tomizawa and the other early Cave staff doing today?
MA: We would only be able to comment on people that are still with Cave. Tsuneki Ikeda is now on the board of directors, while continuing to program for our shooting titles. Kenichi Takano is our CEO. Toshiaki Tomizawa is in charge of product development and things like the Cave Matsuri festivals in Tokyo.

» Makoto Asada is in charge of 360 development at Cave.

RG: Would you ever remake an old Toaplan shooter for the new generation?
Tsuneki Ikeda: I have a great deal of respect for the old Toaplan titles, as well as my predecessors of the time. Cave is not directly related to Toaplan, and given my personal feelings about the matter, I can't imagine myself altering anything in those games.

RG: How much do bullet patterns depend on the programmer or game designer? What have Cave programmers got in common and how are they different?
MA: Actually, I don't think that there are many variations among the different programmers here at Cave in terms of the bullet patterns they create. Instead, there are bullet patterns adapted to a particular game, which we try to match with the particular way a game is designed. For instance, there are bullets in *Deathsmiles 2X* that spawn when your character destroys an enemy in power-up mode. They will come straight at your character, and track him or her while on screen. Still, the player is given enough time to hit both buttons and transform those 'suicide bullets' into a bunch of point items. The bullets themselves aren't very big, so they aren't a huge threat to the player and give them the opportunity to turn the attack into a real score boost. This is one thing that makes *Deathsmiles 2X* a fun game for beginners. On the other hand, there are more aggressive and sharper bullet patterns like what you'd find in *Ketsui*, or overwhelming patterns like *Mushihime-sama Futari* Ultra, which I can only clear in Arrange mode by throwing all the bullets back at the enemies.

> "Although there is intentional slowdown in our games, some arises from hardware limits"

RG: Slowdowns are one of the trademarks of your games. Are all of the slowdowns intended or do you owe some of them to technical bottlenecks?
MA: Although there is intentional slowdown in our games, some of it arises strictly from the limits of the hardware, specifically PCBs. The Xbox 360 has a lot fewer limitations in terms of the sheer number of moving objects on screen, so this allows us to put even more chaos into a game. A good example is *Mushihime-sama Futari* Arrange mode Ultra, where you have the original bullet patterns of the arcade release combined with a reflection mechanic that allows you to throw the bullets back at enemies. Most of this is realised without slowdown. ▶

» Tsuneki Ikeda is a programmer and the visionary behind most Cave games.



"Shoot-'em-ups were the mainstream of games in Japan. It's a genre with a long history"

TI: Up until the release of *Progear*, all of the slowdown you would see in our games was a result of the processing limit of the board, and in fact the battle of the time was: 'How do we cut down the processing here?' However, with the hardware we started using with *Dodonpachi Dai Ou Jou*, the rendering power was lower than the CPU power, which confronted us with our first situation in which the game would not slow down, even if we had a ton of bullets on screen. This resulted in us adding multiple parameters that measured places in which we wanted processing to give players the sensation of the action slowing down, and tweaking these parameters allows us to replicate slowdown in the program. On the other hand, the increased power of the 360 presents challenges when porting games that featured arcade-based slowdown, since it can affect game balance if not implemented correctly.

RG: If the average person took a short look at an older game like *Mushihime-sama* and a new one like *Mushihime-sama Futari*, they probably wouldn't recognise any difference. Could you explain to them what has changed gameplay-wise in your games during the years since *Donpachi*?

TI: You can see the danmaku design being carried over in *ESP Ra.De.* But in *Guwange*, we didn't want to focus just on dodging bullets, and we first included a system that allows the player to destroy or cancel bullets on screen, which adds another level to the gameplay and encourages play for the biggest point gains with the most bullets on screen. This is the same for the next title, *Progear*.

Since the rendering power was decreased after *Dodonpachi Dai Ou Jou*, we decided to switch things around, dropping the number of bullets but increasing their speed, and increased the graphical size of the bullets to improve the game's look. Because *Dodonpachi Dai Ou Jou* was designed as the sequel to *Dodonpachi*, we built on the same 'uniform and direct line' rules. But since we were facing limitations for the size of the bullet patterns, we included plenty of bullets in *Ketsui*, which either accelerate or slow down, or curve in a certain way. This was supposed to be another approach to making enemy attacks more interesting and fun to take on. After *Mushihime-sama*, we switched again to a strategy of pushing the sheer number of bullets on screen to hitherto unknown levels, partially because the rendering power of the hardware had increased so much. And this is where we are today.

RG: What are the decisions in game design that influenced your shooting games most?

TI: I often say this, but the biggest influences for me were *Salamander* and *Battle Garegga*. *Salamander* just for the sheer number of bullets it put on screen, and *Battle Garegga* for the way that enemies shot bullets, which, depending on the way the bullets were put together, built a rhythm with an incredible sense of tension and emergency, even when these bullets were firing in a uniform direction and direct line. This left a deep impression on me.

Now in terms of enemy placement, I took a lot of influence from the methods found in *Kyukyoku Tiger* [*Twin Cobra*] and *Raiden*, which built the rhythm of the game depending on the timing at which enemies appear and the actions the player takes in the period between seeing the enemy on screen and destroying it.

RG: Why do you think shoot-'em-ups remain so popular when so many other traditional arcade genres have fallen by the wayside?

TI: I suppose one aspect is that shooters were the mainstream of videogames in Japan when they were invented and went mainstream. The shoot-'em-up is a genre with a long history. I think another big reason is the fact that fans from the old days, whether they're on the player or developer side, have helped keep the genre alive in one way or another.

RG: Cave released *Guwange* as a download game for Xbox Live Arcade, including a special Arrange mode. Can you explain what's different for this mode?

MA: *Guwange* is our first release on XBLA, and it has the following features: 1) Port of the arcade version. This is a ported mode of the original arcade release of *Guwange*. This mode features the same difficulty and chaining system that characterised the game in Japanese arcades. 2) Special



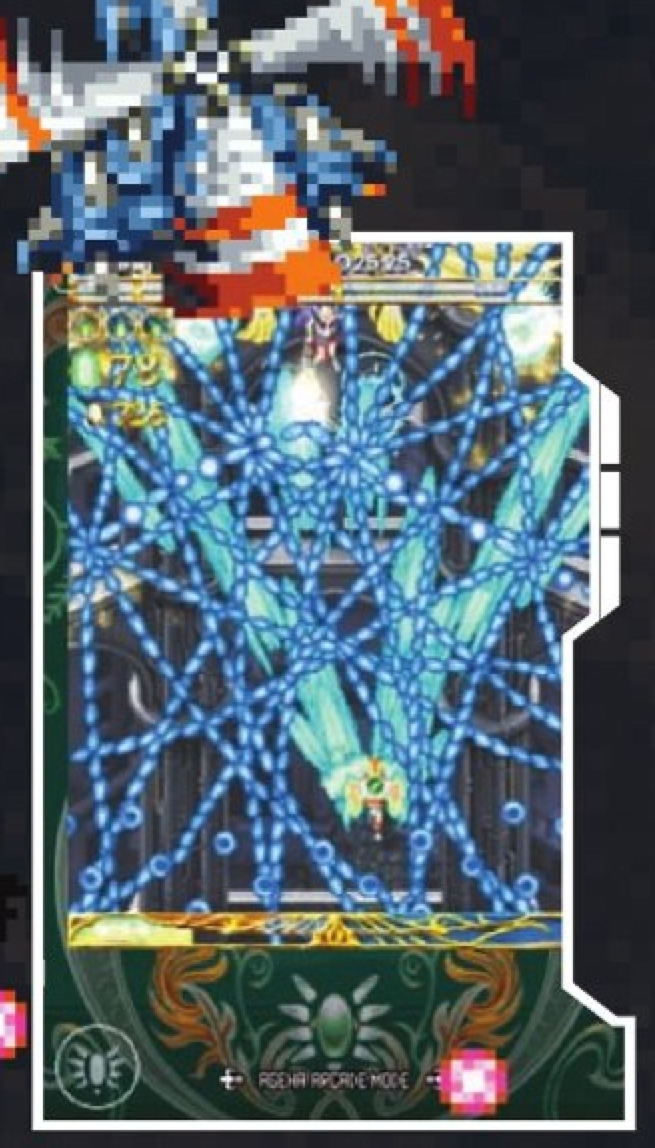
» Yes, a Cave game officially hit the shelves of European stores. The Japanese 360 version of *Deathsmiles* was released two years ago.

Games for Europe

Only a few of Cave's games were ever released outside Japan, and even most of the arcade games are considered for use in Japan only. Sure, you can download the iPhone games or Xbox Live Arcade version of *Guwange*, but *Deathsmiles* for the 360 is the first disc release in Europe since *Steep Slope Sliders* for the Sega Saturn in 1997. The Deluxe Edition includes an additional soundtrack CD and a desktop accessory disc with a calendar, memo, wallpapers, trailers, screenshots, icons and pointers – everything you'll need to theme your PC desktop to *Deathsmiles*. If you're a fan, don't miss out on the Japanese 360 games *Mushihime-sama Futari*, *Espgaluda II Black Label* (regular edition only) and the new double pack *Muchi Muchi Pork & Pink Sweets*, as they are all region free and will run on a European Xbox.



» [Xbox 360] *Dodonpachi Dai-Fukkatsu Black Label* is combining *Dodonpachi* with *Ketsui*-style gameplay.


» [iPhone] You could write a book about the complex scoring system in *Espgaluda II*.

Blue Version. Originally this version was only available at the event that we hold every year in Tokyo called Cave Matsuri. Sometimes one of the programmers will put together a special version of an arcade game, either for fun or for one of these events, and this was one of these special versions. We think of it as a more difficult version of *Guwange*, but some people have found it to be easier than the original game. Give it a try and see what you think. 3) 360 mode. This is an Arrange mode that we built around playing the game with an Xbox 360 pad. In *Guwange*, players control a shikigami, which is like an 'option', and in this mode you're able to move it with the right stick. It's a very beginner-friendly mode, designed to give people their first experience at building a big combo.

RG: *Guwange* is an international release. How many games do we have to buy to see more Cave games released worldwide?
MA: ***Guwange*** **is a test case for us to sell a game internationally. Based on the data we get back about how much it sells overseas, we'll be deciding whether to focus only on the domestic market, or whether to make our games available internationally. Our goal with *Guwange* is 50,000 downloads.**

RG: Many gamers would like to know why you are not releasing all of your Xbox 360 games without region coding. Don't you care about other markets than Japan, is it too expensive to get the approval from Microsoft, or does it cause potential problems when licensing the games later on for foreign markets?
MA: There are no costs associated with making a game region free.

» [Xbox 360] *Nin2-Jump* is an upcoming break from Cave's usual shmup formula. It looks beautiful.



Mainly this is an issue of comparing the opportunities available in making the game region free to locking it and having it put out by a publisher. This will vary by game, however in general the give and take between making a game region free and selling more copies to a limited number of players overseas who import it at a higher price than the domestic price, versus having a publisher push the game and put it on store shelves overseas is quite different. We've gone ahead and decided on a region-free release for *Muchi Muchi Pork & Pink Sweets* on the Xbox 360. We're putting some really fun Arrange modes into these releases, so I hope that international players pick these two unique titles up and enjoy them.

RG: Have you had any offers from international publishers before? If yes, why haven't we seen any of your PlayStation 2 shoot-'em-ups officially in Europe?
MA: There were a few offers in that period, actually. The reasons that the games didn't come out overseas vary with the offers, but mainly it was due to Cave's focus on the domestic market.

RG: Are there any other of your games besides *Deathsmiles* scheduled to be given retail releases in Europe?
MA: We have a few offers on the table. If one of these offers works out well for us and we can find the best partner for our games overseas, I think you will see releases accelerate. Hopefully, *Deathsmiles* will be the first of many.

RG: You announced at this year's Cave Matsuri that M2 is developing a 360 port of your arcade classic *Dangun Feveron*. Will it be released on disc or as an Xbox Live Arcade download?
MA: We haven't decided whether we're going to put *Dangun Feveron* out on XBLA yet. Really we are going to be taking a look at the sales of *Guwange* to decide what direction to go in.

RG: Can we expect a third game in the *Deathsmiles* series?
MA: Right now I'm working on the design concept for *Deathsmiles 3* with Junya Inoue, who was in charge of the art for the first two games. If we do wind up making it, I believe it will be the last game in the series.

RG: Particularly given its sales performance in Japan compared to rival systems, why did you choose the Xbox 360 for porting so many of your games? Why not also port them to another system like the PlayStation 3?
MA: Mainly this was due to the majority of shooter companies focusing on the 360, however this might also be influenced by the fact that I personally like the Xbox 360. We don't have any development planned for the PS3 at the moment; however, you might see some in the future.

Classic game worlds fully charted for your pleasure

Mapped!

#02. Exolon

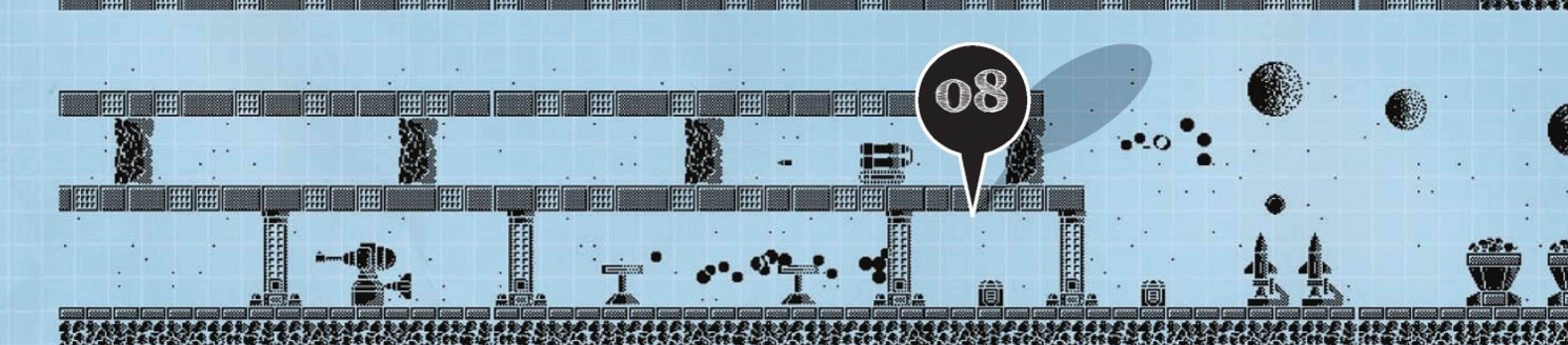
We painstakingly map out the entire first stage of Raff Cecco's superb space blaster **so you don't have to…**

01

02

04

07



Legend:

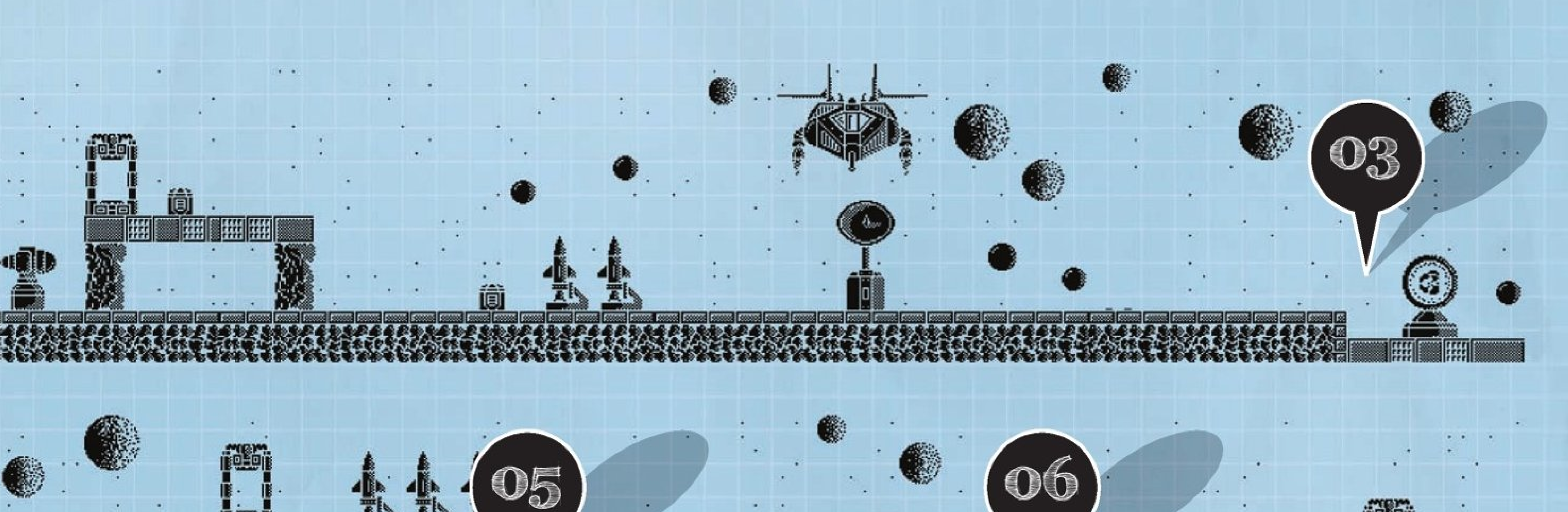
01 Rocket Refill You start with ten rocket grenades, which are essential for blowing up large structures. More can be acquired by walking over the yellow capsules on certain screens.

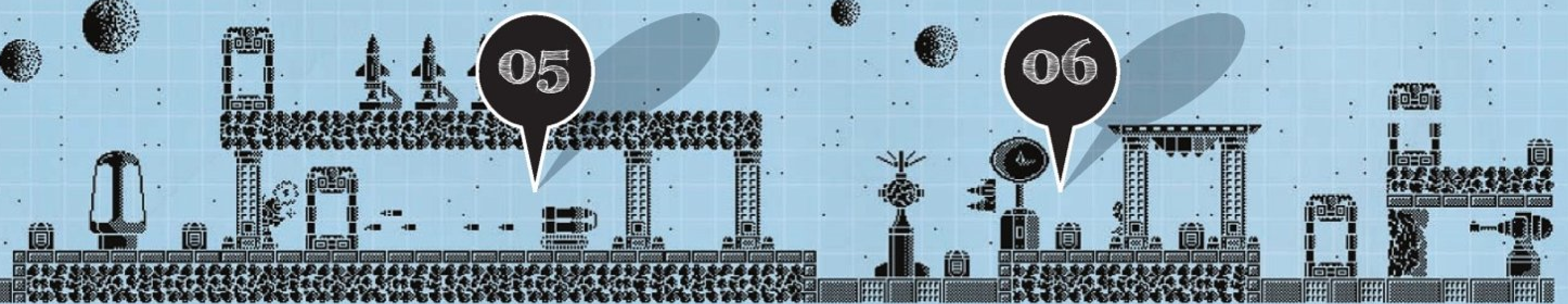
02 Teleporters Teleporters are a useful way of navigating particularly tricky areas. Simply reach one, then press up to instantly transport to the other. Very handy.

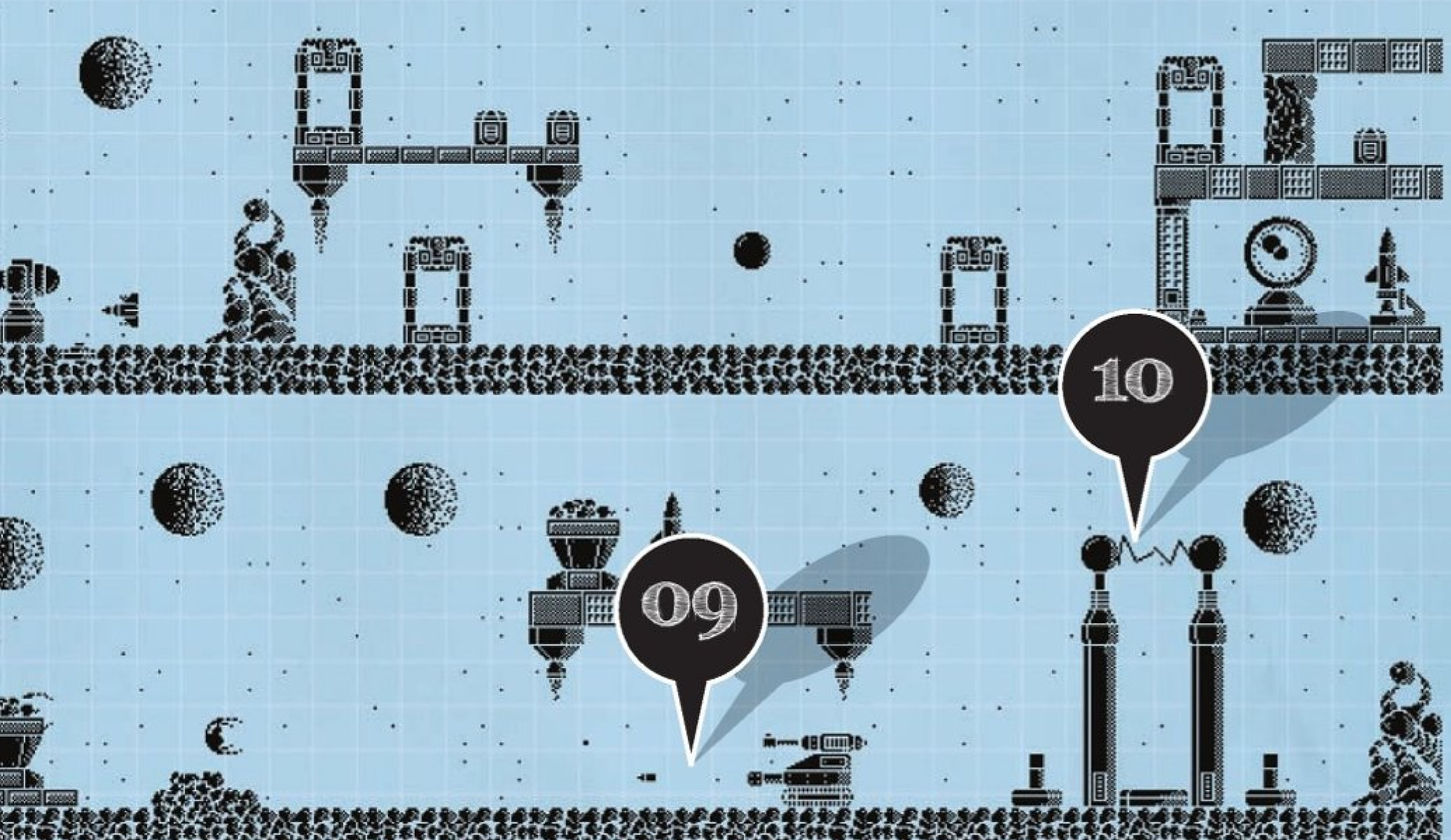
03 Orbs These block progress, and need to be taken out whenever they're encountered. Be wary though, as destroying them unleashes multiple red orbs that kill on contact.

04 Mines These yellow mines immediately kill you on contact, so be sure to leap over them whenever possible. A useful fact is they don't respawn when you die.

05 Cannon These little units throw out numerous bullets (which fortunately can be destroyed). Once you get close enough you'll earn a massive number of bonus points.







What Exolon means to me

"You could say that *Exolon* was the game that really kick-started my career in games. It was the first game I really got stuck into as a freelancer for Hewson Consultants. I had developed *Cop-Out* for Mikro-Gen before that, but I think that was more of a diplomatic gesture after having left the company.

I had already developed a demo of *Exolon* before going to Hewson with it, and Andrew Hewson's initial impression was very positive – he really liked the rocket launcher. It was pretty much a done deal – I didn't need to try and sell the game to anyone else.

Exolon was very much a personal project, as prior to that there was usually some form of collaboration with fellow programmers. It was important on a personal level that the game worked as there was no one to blame if it flopped other than me!

At the time I was very pleased with the press response as *Exolon* received a whole bunch of accolades and brilliant coverage. It was great seeing all those colourful screen shots of my work in the magazines. Overall, it was a well executed project that laid the foundations for *Cybernoid*."

Raffaele Cecco, creator of *Exolon*

06 Ammo dumps 99 bullets only last for so long, so make sure you pick up these handy white refills whenever you see them. You'll thank us when you get out alive.

07 Guided Missile The only way you can take out a guided missile is by destroying its antenna. This usually needs to be done as quickly as possible, so always keep an eye out for them.

08 Hammers These giant green hammers pop up with annoying regularity, causing the loss of a life if you touch them. It's simply a matter of timing here, so do your best to get past them.

09 Gun Placements These are a pain as they shoot out intermittent bullets that rarely appear at the same time. While you can't destroy the turrents, you can shoot the bottom bullets.

10 Base This is your goal, a welcome sight after the gauntlet you've run. Walk through the pylons to finish the stage and enter a bonus level where you can net yourself some bonus points.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Firebird Software

In 1984, British Telecom entered the games industry with Firebird Software. Former employee Richard Hewison talks to fellow staff about how it became one of the most diverse publishing labels in the UK

Change was in the air for British Telecom. Formerly part of the Post Office, the company was due to be privatised in late 1984. Amid this uncertain background, Dr Ederyn Williams, general manager of Information Systems at BT, was pondering where the future of the business might lie.

"Richard Hooper [chief executive for BT's Value Added Systems and Services division] and I had both been heavily involved in the issue of network versus content with Prestel," he explains. Prestel was an interactive videotex subscription service, similar in appearance to the teletext service provided by Ceefax and ORACLE on UK TV.

"We both felt that, over time, network services would become cheaper and the true value would be in content, so the decision was made to go into publishing," remembers Ederyn clearly. This strategy would include the creation of innovative gaming business Gamestar and two new Telecomsoft companies: Telecomsoft Business, which lasted a few years before being shut down, and Telecomsoft Entertainment. Each company would belong to BT's New Information Services division.

Gamestar faux pas

Gamestar was to be the UK's first downloadable computer games service, using the telephone network to deliver games via modem to rented and specially modified 48k Spectrums. Included in the monthly charge would have been a selection of games, refreshed every few months. They were planned to be shunted down the phone lines in sequence, so the computer had to be connected and would then wait to download the chosen game.

James Leavey was working for the Post Office's Data Processing Executive and was assistant editor of its in-house magazine, *Database*. He was also the Post Office's official film and art critic and had regular columns in a raft of other publications connected to BT and the Civil Service.

"In late '83 Dave Laycock read one of my articles," recalls James happily, "and rang me up and asked if I would put a piece in *Database* inviting games testers for Gamestar. I signed up immediately and was sent a load of early Spectrum computer games, which I tested with my two young children."

"One day Dave invited me over to his office to meet Trevor Havelock," adds James. "Richard Hooper wanted to create a software publishing company with a distinct brand image. He wanted something similar to the book publisher Penguin in the sense that the titles would be very affordable, yet they would also have the best products."

The meeting concluded with James being offered the job of PR and marketing manager for Telecomsoft. Although he didn't know it at the time, he had just become Telecomsoft Entertainment's first official employee.

"I went over to Telecomsoft on a temporary promotion in July '84, but I had no real idea what marketing involved, so I got sent away to learn all about it," remembers James with a smile.

INSTANT EXPERT

The £1.99 budget release *Blow Out* for the 48k Spectrum was actually *Invasion Of The Body Snatchas* from Crystal Computing. No attempt was made to hide this fact when the game was loading, but it wasn't mentioned anywhere on the inlay or the cassette.

The Firebird Super Silver release *Willow Pattern Adventure* (re-released for £1.99 the following year as *Willow Pattern*) was nothing more than a subtly altered version of developer Mr Micro's previous C64 game, *Treasure Island*, but with new graphics and a few small changes to the map.

Budget release *Byte Bitten* started life as *Jump-Jettin*, which was an attempt by author Tony Barber to write a Spectrum version of *Falcon Patrol* by Virgin Games, which rejected it as not being similar enough to the C64 original. Tony made the main game a piece of another game and it became *Byte Bitten*, which was submitted to Firebird months later. Virgin then complained that it was too similar to *Falcon Patrol*, but Tony produced the letter stating the opposite. The Harrier jets were changed to Sea King helicopters, and the game was published by Firebird as planned.

> **"People would send us print-outs saying, 'If you type it all in, it's a really good game!'"**
> JAMES LEAVEY DESCRIBES THE PROCESS OF TESTING GAME SUBMISSIONS

While James went off to be educated in his new art, BT learned a lesson of its own. The strategy behind its new Gamestar venture was pioneering in those pre-internet days, but the technology and the infrastructure to make it reality wasn't quite there yet.

"We lost faith due to the slow start-up of cable TV, the fact that cable systems were not going to be as interactive as we had hoped, and the complexities and non-standardisation of games software. We also saw a similar service in the US called The Games Network faltering," says Ederyn, explaining why BT abandoned the service before it was launched.



The Stravinsky Strategy

As Gamestar was being dropped, Telecomsoft proceeded as planned. Tony Rainbird was running Micro Gold, a developer based in Chelmsford, Essex, when he was approached by Ederyn with an interesting proposal.

"Someone in BT read an article about me in *Personal Computer World* and had played one of my games called *Run Baby Run*," says Tony. Ederyn visited him at his house and several weeks later Tony was offered the job of starting Firebird on the proviso that someone would assume control later.

With a few key people now employed, attention within BT quickly turned to the publishing label. Approximately 30 names were considered, with Firefly eventually chosen. A full-page advert was published in a number of computer magazines in early 1984, promising to explain "how to turn your software into hard cash".

"However, soon afterwards we received various complaints relating to the Firefly name," admits Ederyn. By then, James Leavey had returned from his training. The doubt over the Firefly name was delaying progress, so James arranged an emergency meeting after he discovered that the name was already registered.

"Assuming that the 'fire' bit of the name was important, we brainstormed for alternative fire-related names," recalls Ederyn. James remembers suggesting Firebird, simply because: "I had been listening to Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* earlier that day."

Everyone agreed that Firebird was the best alternative. Steps were immediately taken to register the name and design a logo to appear on all packaging. Thankfully, James Leavey had already approached Terry Finnegan, creative director at graphic design company Simonson Finnegan, to come up with some designs. The name change didn't cause too many problems, and what Terry came up with was bright, bold and striking.

"My initial design was accepted without any alterations," says Terry proudly. The classic red Firebird logo with the outstretched wings would have a few

BY THE NUMBERS

2 Firebird Software had two owners: British Telecom and MicroProse.

5 The number of bad games included in Firebird Silver's *Don't Buy This!* compilation.

6 The number of years Firebird lasted, from 1984 to 1990.

10 The number of games that Odin Computer Graphics was contracted to produce for Telecomsoft.

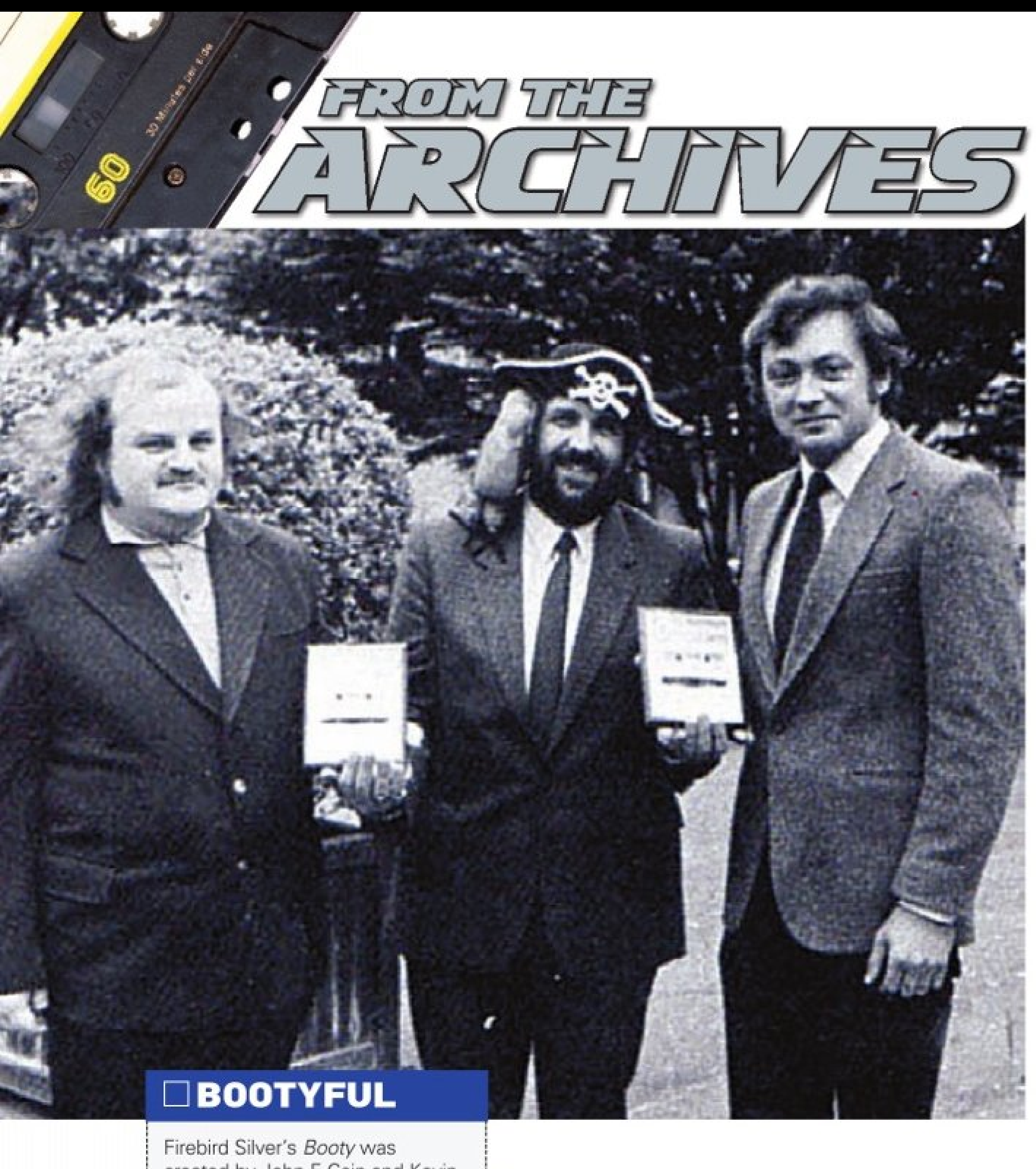
20 The number of Activision games that were later re-released by Firebird Silver at budget prices.

630 The approximate total number of Firebird games published, including all budget titles.

100,000 How much Telecomsoft paid in pounds for the rights to publish the *Elite* conversions.

250,000 How many games the Firebird Silver budget range sold in the first few months on the market.

1,000,000 Approximately how much Telecomsoft paid in pounds to EMAP for Beyond Software.



» (Left) *Booty* sold over 100,000 copies and *Home Computer Weekly* awarded the programmers with a gold cassette.



» [Amiga] The only game developed by MicroProse on the Firebird label was *Fire And Brimstone*.

BOOTYFUL

Firebird Silver's *Booty* was created by John F Cain and Kevin Moughtin and was originally a Rabbit Software game called *Jolly Roger*. James Leavey wined and dined John and Kevin and persuaded them to sign with Firebird after Rabbit went bust.

Booty was a huge success across a number of formats, selling well over 100,000 copies. *Home Computing Weekly* editor Dave Carlos marked this achievement by presenting James Leavey with a gold cassette – in reality a cheap and cheerful plastic cassette with some pictures stuck on it with glue!

tweaks as the brand changed during its six-year life, but otherwise it remained pretty much untouched. Terry went on to design all of the initial Firebird layout and artwork for Telecomsoft and worked on some of the other publishing labels that emerged later.

The Firebird 20

"There was a big response to the adverts and it was a very hard slog to go through all the submissions to try to find the occasional gem!" remembers Tony.

James also recalls the process vividly: "People would send us print-outs saying, 'If you type it all in, it's a really good game!' Thankfully Tony Rainbird had a lot to do with picking out the good ones. He designed games and had written a few, so he really understood them."

They were determined to find 20 games to launch for Christmas 1984, and so James drafted in help from outside the office.

"I used to try the games out on my kids and their friends, asking them what they thought. If they sat playing for hours, I thought, 'That's all right.' After all, the games weren't aimed at people like me!"

Snake Bite, *Mickey The Bricky*, *Bird Strike*, *Gold Digger*, *Duck!*, *Run Baby Run*, *Exodus*, *Viking Raiders*, *Terra Force*, *Menace*, *Byte Bitten*, *The Wild Bunch*, *Acid Drops*, *Mr Freeze*, *Booty*, *Headache*, *Zulu*, *Estra* and *Crazy Caverns* were chosen for Firebird's launch titles. The games covered a variety of formats, including 16k/48k Spectrums, the Commodore 64, the Commodore VIC-20 and the BBC Model B.

"Tony encouraged me to write all the inlay stories, which got wilder and wilder the later in the day it got. We had a laugh doing it!" explains James.

While the selection process was in its early stages, marketing consultant Theresa Jackson recommended a two-tier approach, with a premium Gold range retailing at £5.95 and a Silver range aimed at the budget price of £2.50.

"It was practical for Telecomsoft to set up a budget label and learn from that, establish contacts in the fledgling industry, and get the word around that BT was in the games business," says Tony. With the launch titles ready, James and Tony took samples directly to the distributors.

"I think what sold Firebird to the retailers was the quality of the games, the pricing structure and that trust factor that came from being associated with the Post Office," says James. "There was also a lot of interest because of the BT flotation, and that generated huge attention right around the world."

The first batch of Firebird adverts used 'seeing is believing' as part of the campaign. This reflected the decision to go with screenshots on the inlay covers, as BT's Richard Hooper explained in an early Firebird press release: "You can now judge a game by its cover. In a market where quality and prices tend to be variable and complaints of misrepresentation frequent, Firebird is setting new standards."

Of course, as the market matured, Firebird switched to using artwork on the inlays like everyone else, but at least the original intention was sincere!

Firebird's crucial first couple of months saw it rack up impressive sales of over 250,000 units without a sales manager. All of the hard work put in by James Leavey, Tony Rainbird and the rest of Telecomsoft paid off, but that was just the start.

"It was all about this game called Elite that would change the industry"

HERBERT WRIGHT EXPLAINS HOW HE WAS PERSUADED TO JOIN FIREBIRD

TIMELINE

- **1984** BT DECIDES TO SET UP GAMES PUBLISHER TELECOMSOFT
- **1984** BT ADVERTISES FOR GAMES USING THE NAME FIREFLY SOFTWARE
- **1984** BT RECRUITS JAMES LEAVEY, TONY RAINBIRD AND EVENTUALLY JAMES SCOULAR TO START FIREBIRD
- **1984** 20 GAMES ARE PUBLISHED ON THE £2.50 FIREBIRD SILVER RANGE
- **1984** BT BIDS £100,000 TO WIN RIGHTS TO PUBLISH CONVERSIONS OF *ELITE*
- **1985** JAMES SCOULAR DIES FROM A HEART ATTACK
- **1985** FIREBIRD GOLD PUBLISHES *BUGGY BLAST, DEMONS OF TOPAZ, GYRON, ELITE* AND *REVS*
- **1985** FIREBIRD LICENSEES INC OPENS IN USA
- **1985** FIREBIRD SILVER RANGE REVAMPED WITH NEW PACKAGING AND £1.99 RRP
- **1985** BT BUYS BEYOND SOFTWARE FOR ALMOST £1,000,000
- **1986** FIREBIRD GOLD PUBLISHES *THE SENTINEL* FOR THE COMMODORE 64
- **1986** TELECOMSOFT LAUNCHES RAINBIRD SOFTWARE
- **1986** FIREBIRD LICENSEES IN THE USA HIT NUMBER ONE IN THE CHARTS WITH *ELITE*
- **1986** TELECOMSOFT SIGNS RIGHTS TO CONVERT TAITO'S *FLYING SHARK* AND *BUBBLE BOBBLE*
- **1987** FIREBIRD PUBLISHES THE MUCH-DELAYED *STAR TREK: THE REBEL UNIVERSE* FOR THE ATARI ST
- **1988** THE BUDGET RANGE IS REBRANDED AS SILVERBIRD, AND FIREBIRD GETS A NEW LOOK

New Elite crew

When Tony Rainbird was given the job of starting Firebird, it was only meant to be until Telecomsoft found someone else to run the company. By the time that person was found, the launch titles had been chosen and things were quite advanced.

The man given the task was James Scoular, as Herbert Wright explains: "James Scoular and I had been old friends and worked together in the early Eighties selling advertising on VNU Publications' computer magazines, the biggest of which was *Personal Computer World*. By September '84, James was publisher at VNU, so we were all surprised when he resigned and joined BT."

James arrived at Telecomsoft and immediately began assembling his own team of people to take Firebird to the next level.

"Some months later, James told me that it was all about this game called *Elite* that would change the industry, and he'd been brought on board to get it and make it big," recounts Herbert. "He asked if I would like to join him, so I said yes!"

Elite for the BBC Micro was a landmark game with regard to its open-ended design and 3D wireframe graphics. The co-authors, Ian Bell and David Braben, initiated a UK games industry frenzy when Jacqui Lyons at licensing agent Marjacq announced that the rights to publish conversions of *Elite* would be auctioned, with the highest sealed bid being the winner.

Telecomsoft saw *Elite* as its chance to become a big player in the market, so it made an ambitious bid of £100,000 and won, paving the way for ten versions of the game produced across nine different platforms in just over five years.

The original *Elite* programmers wrote the Commodore 64 version, but they had no experience coding for that machine and required a kick start. While writing a C64 game called *Skyline Attack* for Century Software, programmers Jez San and Fouad Katan had begun creating what was later called PDS (Programmer's Development System), which became a tool commonly used throughout the industry for cross-platform development over the next five or six years.

Ian Bell and David Braben used code created for PDS to get *Elite* working quickly. This allowed Firebird to demonstrate an early version for the C64 just weeks after it had acquired the rights at the February 1985 LET Show in London, although the sight of the Commodore 64 being discretely connected to a BBC Micro running PDS did confuse a few onlookers!

Tragedy and triumph

Sadly, James didn't get to see any of the success that *Elite* ultimately brought to Telecomsoft. Shortly after work had begun on the Commodore 64 conversion, tragedy struck.

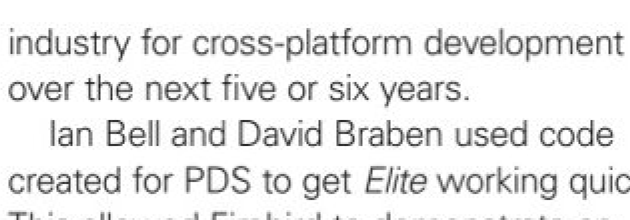
"Just after we demonstrated *Elite* at the LET Show, James was taken to hospital with a coronary," remembers Herbert. "He never came out and died three weeks later. I was stunned. He was only 27, and a fitness fanatic who would rise at dawn to go rowing on the Thames before work. I gave the eulogy at his funeral." Herbert had only recently joined Telecomsoft on James's invitation, having been brought in to manage the *Elite* conversion projects and other up-and-coming Firebird Gold titles.

After James' untimely death, Firebird needed reorganising. Joss Ellis came in to give vital support to Herbert on *Elite* and other projects with the job title of contract development manager.

"Joss proved brilliant at dealing with programmers and testing the games," remembers Herbert. "Ed Williams made me acting head of Firebird in May '85 ▶

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Dr Ederyn Williams
After doing his MA in natural sciences at Cambridge and his D.Phil in psychology at Oxford, Ederyn spent seven years as a researcher at various academic institutions. He then joined BT, managing new businesses in software including Telecomsoft, cable television, online data retrieval and telephone information services. In 1991 he became managing director of University of Leeds Innovations before joining the University of Warwick in April 2000 to found Warwick Ventures.


» Dr Ederyn Williams

James Leavey
James left Firebird to join BT's mainstream PR. In 1990, he became a full-time journalist and PR consultant and has since written for over 100 publications and broadcast around the world. Best known as editor of the widely acclaimed *Forest Guide To Smoking In London* and *Scotland*, he now lives in Cowes where, among many other things, he has been writing a weekly blog for Virgin Holidays Cruises for over two years.

Herbert Wright
After Telecomsoft, Herbert launched the games division of Logotron, then became a consultant working around the world. In the Nineties he gave all that up to promote psychedelic clubs in Camden Town and was a band booker, band manager and top indie DJ while occasionally writing for *MacUser* magazine. This century Herbert returned to journalism and has written about mobile telecoms and become an architectural writer. He has had three books published and contributes to *Blueprint* and *Wired* magazines as well as some major London websites. He also works part-time at the Institute of Contemporary Arts.


» James Leavey


» Herbert Wright


» Herbert Wright demos *Elite* just weeks after Firebird outbid everyone to the rights.

1988 – FIREBIRD PUBLISHES *BLACK LAMP*, 16-BIT VERSIONS OF *ELITE* AND DAVID BRABEN'S *VIRUS*
1989 – BT SELLS TELECOMSOFT TO MICROPROSE
1989 – MICROPROSE SELLS BUDGET LABEL SILVERBIRD TO TUDOR ENTERPRISES
1990 – MICROPROSE PUBLISHES THE FINAL FIREBIRD GAME, *FIRE AND BRIMSTONE*, FOR ST AND AMIGA

"The product that I'm proudest of publishing was Geoff Crammond's The Sentinel"

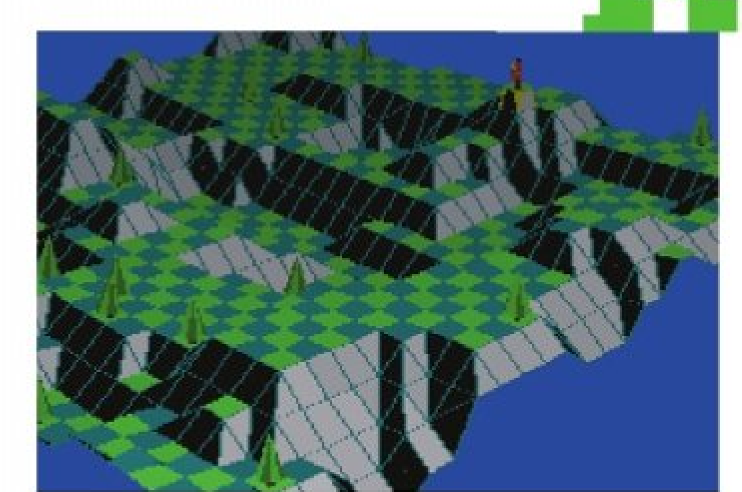
HERBERT WRIGHT COMMENDS ONE OF FIREBIRD'S BEST EVER GAMES

before confirming in September. My mission was to maximise on *Elite* and build up Firebird's value, particularly with the higher-priced Gold range, of which *Elite* was the flagship."

Firebird Gold made a solid debut with the Commodore 64 platformer *Demons Of Topaz* by Andrew Bailey, who had also written *Headache* for the Firebird budget range. The 48k Spectrum got *Buggy Blast*, created by future Rainbird publisher Paul Hibbard and musician David Lowe. Both games retailed at £5.95. The next Gold release from Firebird raised the bar a few more notches, but also split opinion within Telecomsoft, as James Leavey colourfully remembers.

"Jesus, what the fuck was *Gyron* all about?" he laughs, shaking his head. Well, James, at its heart *Gyron* for the 48k Spectrum was a 3D maze game with giant roaming spheres and deadly towers. It was technically exceptional and looked head and shoulders above most other Spectrum games. Firebird threw a large amount of marketing at the game, including an in-box competition to win a Porsche 924 Lux sports car, a self-running 'demonstrator' cassette to run in shops, and a big advertising push.

As with any business, people would come and go on a fairly regular basis, and a few months after James Scoular's death, James Leavey transferred to BT's National Networks Trunk Services division as PR manager. Meanwhile, Herbert was suitably impressed with *Gyron* developer Torus and offered the studio the job of writing the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions of *Elite*. The 8-bit Firebird versions were a huge hit and successfully elevated Telecomsoft throughout Europe. However, Europe wasn't the extent of the company's ambition. Original *Elite* co-author Ian Bell was commissioned to write an Apple II version of his game


» [Amiga] The 16-bit versions of *The Sentinel* featured a very handy in-game map function.



» [Atari ST] Elite on the ST and Amiga featured solid 3D.

to help Firebird's move into the more lucrative US market.

Golden US

Ederyn recruited Marten Davies to set up a US Firebird office, as Marten explains: "I arrived in the States on 5 August '85 and started the operation from the basement of a rented house on Church Street in Ramsey, New Jersey. The initial couple of months were literally funded by using my AmEx card."

Marten wasted no time and Firebird Licensees Incorporated shipped its first games on 5 October, just two months later. *Elite* wasn't the only game Firebird released in the US, but it did cement its Stateside reputation, selling steadily until reaching critical mass the following May when it hit the number one spot on the *Billboard* magazine software charts.

"It was a terrific moment for our little group," recalls Marten happily.

Firebird Licensees eventually settled into modern offices in Waldwick, New Jersey. Dan Horn was hired as vice president in product development, and he signed an exclusive deal with Bantam to release games like *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Cave Of Time*, *Escape*, *Fantastic Animals* and *I, Damiano* in the States. The US operation also released other UK publishers' titles via the Firebird label, including Ocean's *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*, *Colossus Chess IV* from CDS, and *The Battle For Midway* and *The Battle Of Britain* from PSS. It also published a Macintosh word processor in the US called Laser Author, which was developed by UK firm Icon Technology. Known as Mac Author in the UK, Telecomsoft used the application on a day-to-day basis in the London office, and the late great writer and technology evangelist Douglas Adams was also a big fan, using it to write his *Dirk Gently* novels.

The US office lasted until April 1988 before it was shut down following a review led by new Telecomsoft general manager

SIX OF THE BEST



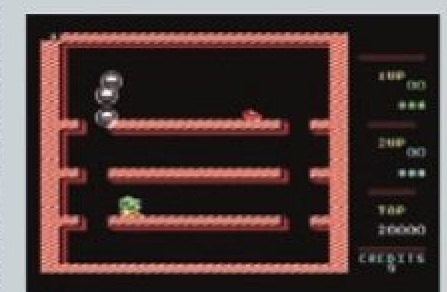
Thrust

Mix gravity, inertia and vector graphics in a game inspired by Atari's *Gravitar* and you get Jeremy Smith's *Thrust*. Originally written for Superior Software as a full-price game, the BT versions were published as part of the Firebird Silver range.



The Sentinel

Impossible to describe in a few sentences, *The Sentinel*'s looks are deceiving. Once you start playing and get sucked in, the panic that grabs you when the Sentinel's gaze falls upon your robot is palpable. An absolute classic.



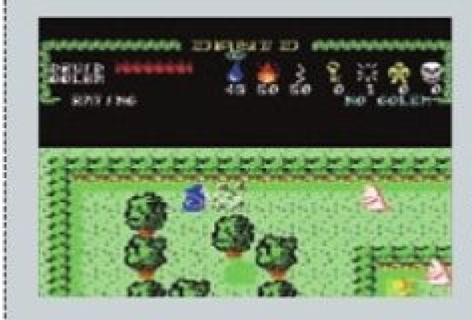
Bubble Bobble

Bubble-blowing dinosaurs who eat fruit and capture and pop monsters trapped inside their bubbles. Firebird's conversions weren't 100 per cent accurate, but they did a very good job of translating the coin-op's controls.



Virus

Another game that uses gravity and inertia, but played over an undulating 3D landscape. *Virus* is a tricky game to master, but if you can use the mouse successfully it's a real blast. There's even a Spectrum version!



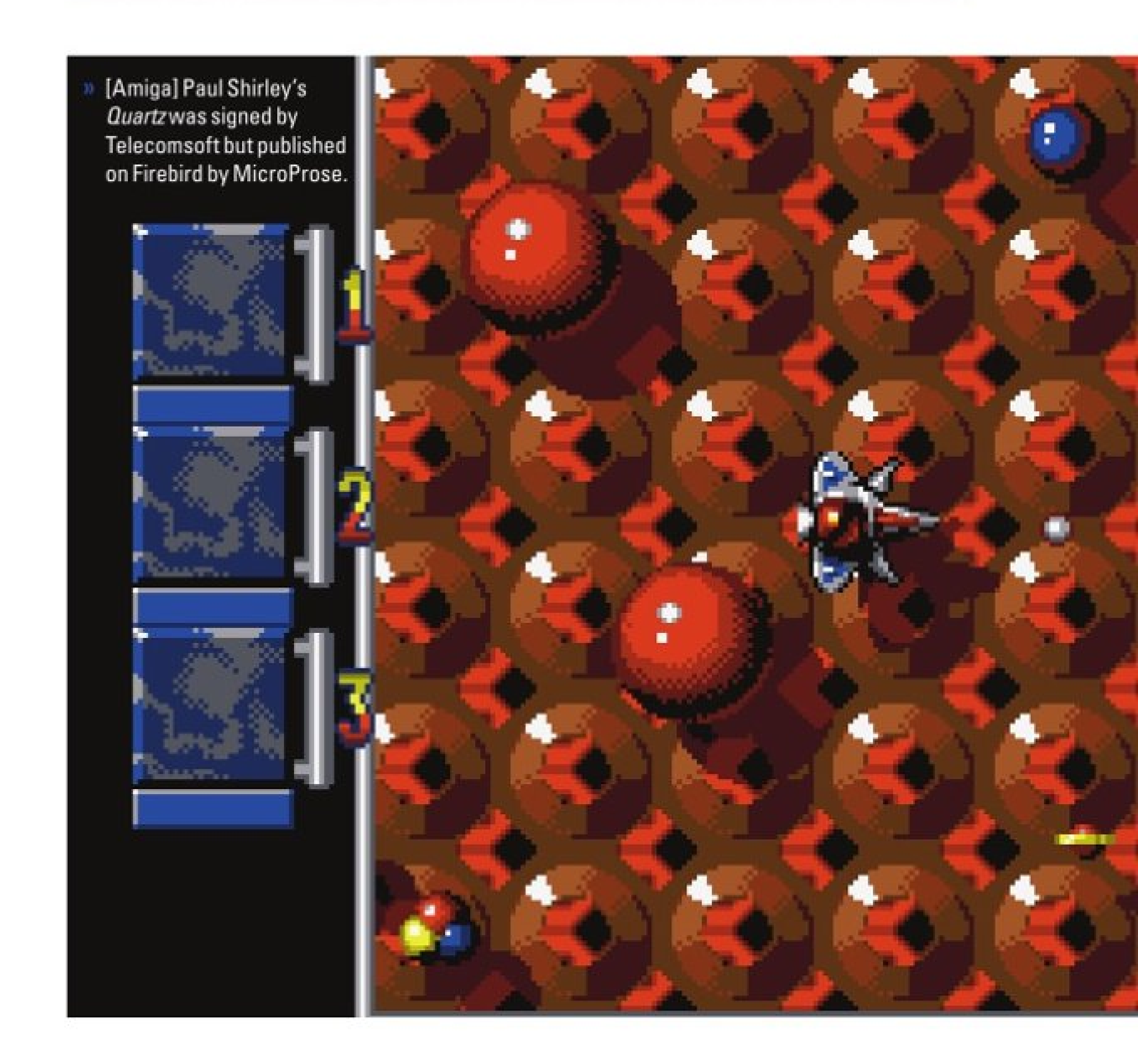
Druid

Partially inspired by desktop *D&D*, *Gauntlet* and *The Tomb Of Drewan*, *Druid* is a great arcade maze game with some terrific graphics and that unquantifiable quality that makes you want to keep going and get to the next dungeon level.



Intensity

Andrew Braybrook's trademark 'look' was used on this antidote to shoot-'em-ups. Colliding with aliens was as violent as it got as the player tried to rescue colonists in this game that would work well on modern touch-screen devices.


» [Amiga] Paul Shirley's *Quartz* was signed by Telecomsoft but published on Firebird by MicroProse.


» A selection of the Firebird titles that launched the company.



» 'Seeing is believing' promoted Firebird Silver's use of screenshots on the inlay covers.

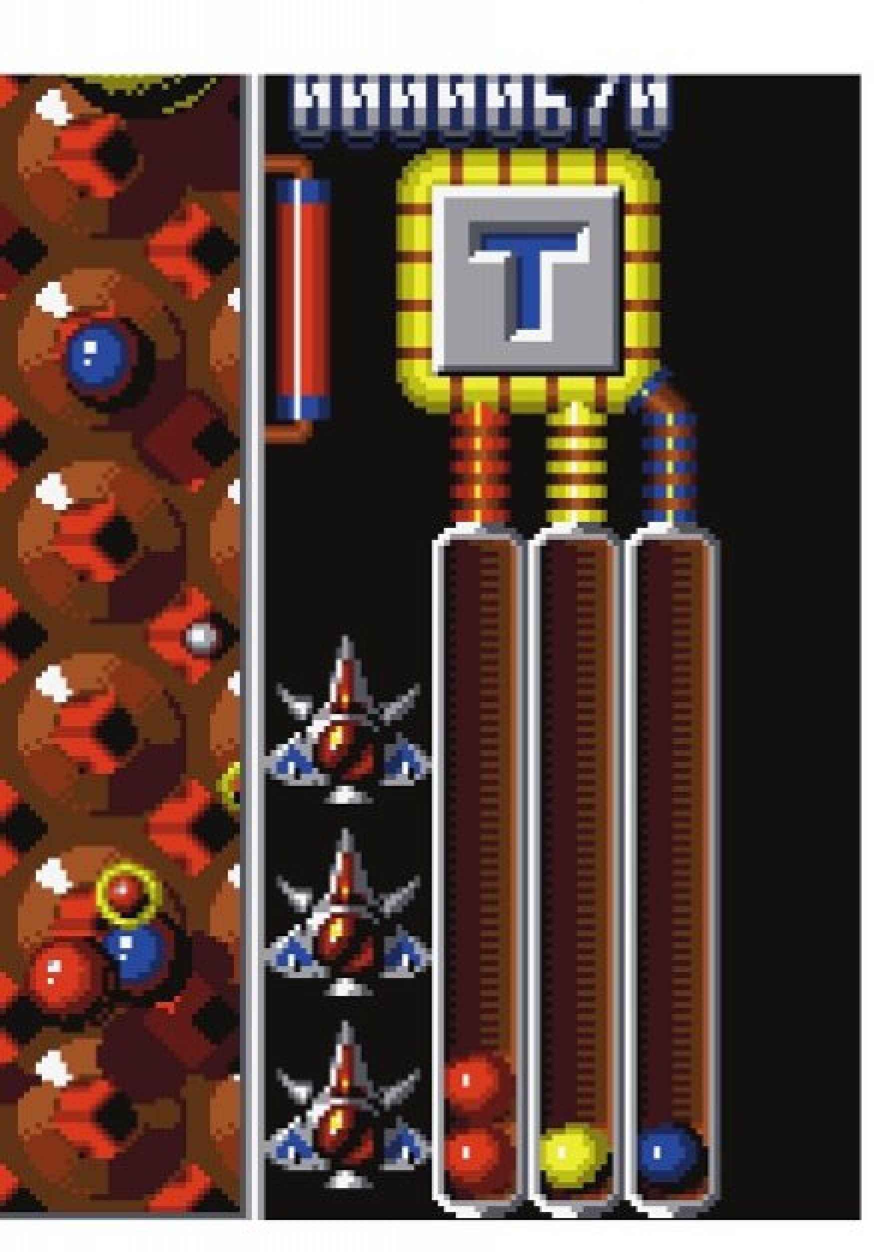
Paula Byrne, recruited the year before from fellow publisher Melbourne House, who felt that the products weren't US-centric enough. A new, smaller US operation was launched from within the offices of newly appointed distributor Mediagenic, leading to different packaging that was better suited to the US market.

Odin and beyond

The financial reward that publishing *Elite* brought to Telecomsoft was significant, and it attracted others eager to help the company spend its newfound wealth. Magazine publisher EMAP had decided to sell off its games publishing label Beyond Software, which it touted to Telecomsoft to see if there was any interest. There was, but it was the million pound price tag that didn't sit comfortably with some of the Telecomsoft team. The feeling was that the huge cost could have been more effectively spent internally on new projects and new staff. With hindsight, that would have been a much better investment. Problems with Beyond's products – especially First Star's *Superman* game – and some reluctant ex-EMAP staff led to a poor return. Beyond Software barely lasted 18 months under BT ownership before it was quietly phased out.

Around the same time, Liverpool-based Odin Computer Graphics signed an exclusive 12-month worldwide marketing and distribution deal with Telecomsoft. It was contracted to produce ten titles across a variety of different platforms. Unfortunately, the deal turned sour quite quickly, with managing director Paul McKenna feeling he had no choice but to threaten then initiate legal proceedings more than once after Telecomsoft allegedly withheld the regular monthly payments for a variety of contested reasons.

"This obviously stifled development as we had no other form of revenue to pay wages, bills and so on," says Paul. In the end, Odin delivered nine titles including *I.C.U.P.S.*, *Mission AD*, *Heartland*, *On The Tiles*, *The Plot*, *UFO*, *Hypaball*, *Scary Monsters* and *Sidewize*. However, none of the Odin titles that were published by Telecomsoft were particularly successful, with the developer's inaugural effort, *Heartland* – developed under the name *Kimera* – probably being the best of a mixed bunch. By the end of the contract, a number of the company's staff had left and Paul felt he had no choice but to close OCG.



Labels come and go

Although Firebird Gold became a major part of the business, the Silver range was also performing well. The £2.50 RRP was reduced to £1.99 a year after launch and now included re-releasing other publishers' titles alongside new budget games like the classic *Thrust*, *Twinky Goes Hiking*, and Sensible Software's *Galax-I-Birds*.

When Firebird Gold moved from £5.95 to a higher price point, another new label was introduced. The Firebird Super Silver range had an RRP of £3.95 and was considered to be a premium budget label. It included a *Thunderbirds* game based on Gerry Anderson's puppet-driven television series, Shahid Ahmad's isometric adventure *Chimera*, *Willow Pattern Adventure* from Mr Micro and *Chickin Chase* from French developer Jawx.

Firebird Super Silver ultimately proved short-lived, and many of the titles reappeared less than a year later on the cheaper £1.99 range. The label was probably best remembered for the fragile white clamshell-style plastic cassette cases that broke far too easily, which is not a good sign!

Another sub-label that came and went was Firebird Hot!, which was looked after by Joss Ellis and Herbert Wright. "We coined the name because 'fire' and 'hot' obviously go together, and we all liked curries!" laughs Herbert. Retailing at £7.95, a small handful of games were released including *Costa Capers*, *Gerry The Germ Goes Body Poppin'*, *Runestone*, *The Comet Game*, *Vectron* and *Rasputin*.

16-bit revolution

Firebird published a raft of 8-bit games over the next few years with varying degrees of success. *Druid* was an excellent *Gauntlet*-style game that spawned an equally ▶


» The Rainbird logo was designed when the label was going to be called Bluebird.

TELECOMSOFT'S NEW BIRD

Among a background of constant change – James Scoular passing away, Herbert Wright running Firebird, *Elite* selling spectacularly well, James Leavey departing and Beyond being purchased for a huge amount of money – Tony Rainbird had an idea for a new publishing label that would produce higher-quality software, including utilities as well as deeper and more complex titles like simulators, war games, text adventures and RPGs.

Firebird was generally perceived as an arcade game brand, yet it also published titles like *Gyron*, *Elite*, *Cholo* and *Revs* on the Gold label that clearly bucked the trend. The proposed new Bluebird label would help clear up any confusion by giving Firebird the arcade and budget titles so the new label could concentrate on more sophisticated products that would come with 'value added' items at a premium price.

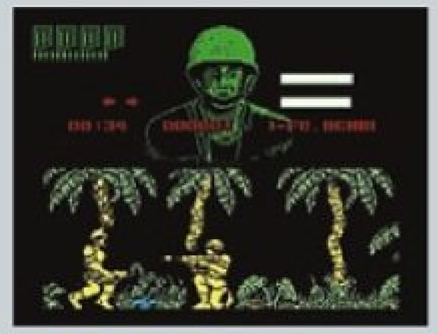
The end result was a new sister label called Rainbird Software that was launched with very little marketing in 1986 yet went on to publish some very successful titles, especially on the new ST and Amiga. Its distinctive blue boxes would become synonymous with quality software, but that is another story for another day.

THREE TO AVOID



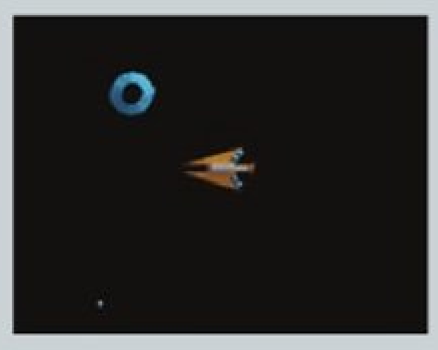
Hopper Copper

If pretending to be a policeman bouncing on top of robbers using a space hopper is your idea of fun, consider your search for your perfect game over. It sounds to us as though Silverbird's Colin Fuidge thought the idea was so hilariously bad that it had to be published for a laugh.



GI Hero

A huge soldier sprite explores a 2D jungle, looking for soldiers to shoot or items to collect. A dog can be befriended and will jump on the enemy. Using a huge mask around the large figures (a technique borrowed from Maelstrom's Dark Sceptre) is its only redeeming feature.



Whirligig

Maelstrom was obviously experimenting with its 3D system here. The game could literally last just a few seconds thanks to the ship's suicidal knack for launching a missile up its own engines! An absolutely woeful game from the team that went on to produce *Midwinter* and *Starlord*.

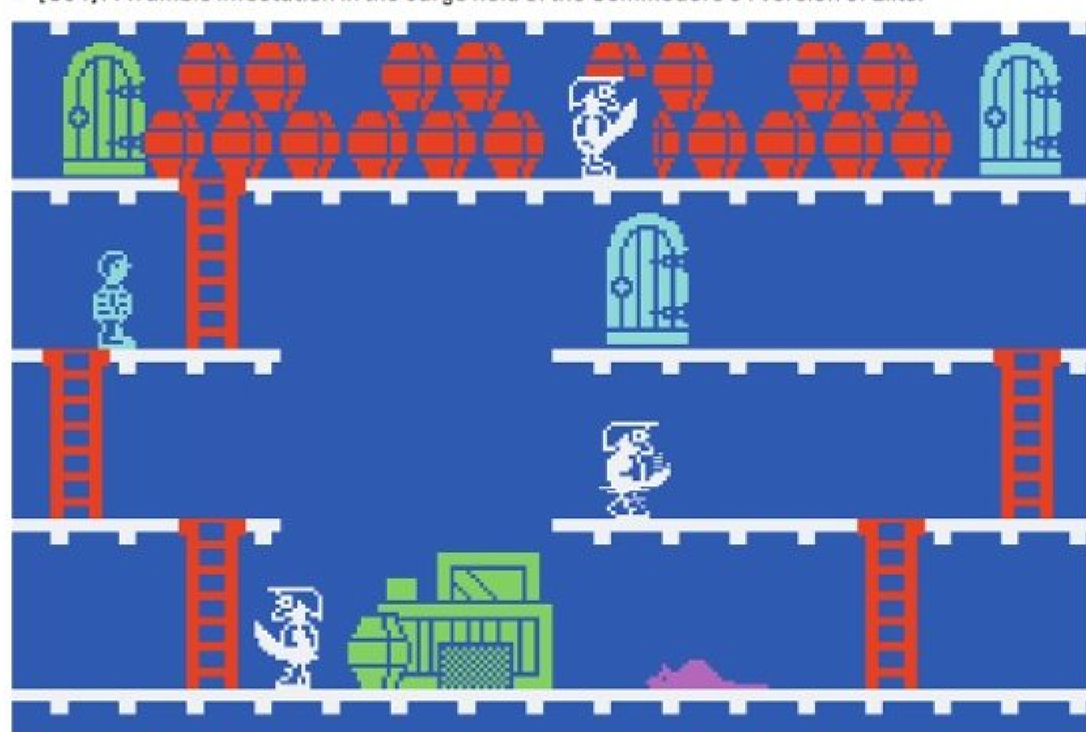


Oriental Hero

This Spectrum budget title from Tron Software was the follow-up to its *Ninja Master* game. Sadly, it was incredibly basic and was also hard as nails and unfair to play. It was an awful game that had no redeeming features at all. Even the loading screen was awful. Avoid!



» [C64] A Trumble infestation in the cargo hold of the Commodore 64 version of *Elite*.



» [Spectrum] *Booty* was a huge seller, but the announced Sinclair QL version never appeared.

"Running Telecomsoft was one of the best jobs anyone could have had"

TELECOMSOFT'S GENERAL MANAGER PAULA BYRNE REMEMBERS HER TIME FONDLY

good sequel; *IO* was a graphically excellent but very tough shoot-'em-up; *Earthlight* was an interesting 3D shoot-'em-up for the Spectrum from Pete Cooke; *Samurai Warrior* from Beam was an enjoyable arcade adventure based on samurai rabbit comic book *Usagi Yojimbo*; and Beam also produced *Fist+*, which borrowed a few ideas from *IK+* and the Sega coin-op *Shinobi*. A legal wrangle with Hewson delayed Firebird from publishing Graftgold's *Magnetron* until early 1988, but this was soon followed by Graftgold's other 8-bit titles, *Soldier Of Fortune* and *Intensity*.

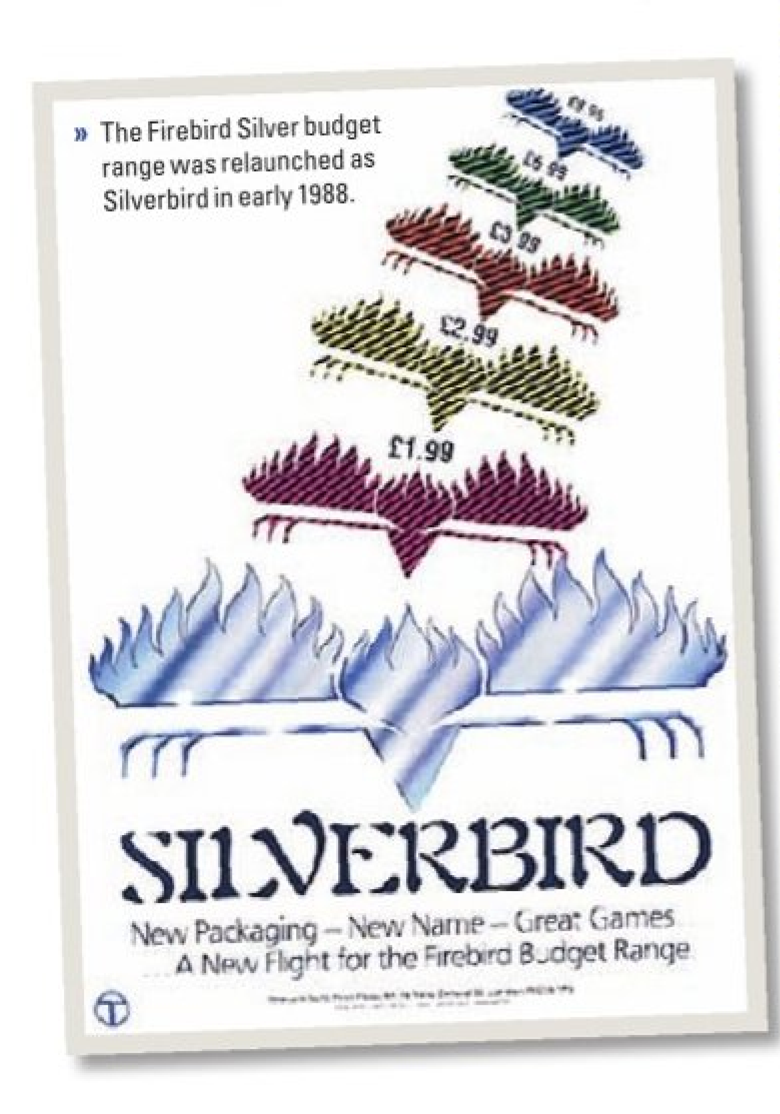
It was around the time of the transition between 8-bit and 16-bit development in late 1987 that Herbert Wright decided that he needed a change. "In September '87 I left to set up a new games division for Logotron, a Cambridge-based educational software publisher," he explains. Firebird Silver chief Chris Smith also decided to call it a day that year, with Colin Fuidge assuming the role of overseeing the budget range. Tony Rainbird had left the year before in November 1986, and Paul Hibbard, programmer behind *Buggy Blast* and *Rasputin*, had since assumed the role of publisher for Rainbird Software.

By early 1988, sales in 8-bit games were dwindling as the 16-bit Atari ST and Commodore Amiga dominated. Firebird was one of the first publishers out of the blocks, publishing a number of 16-bit arcade games including *Golden Path*, Steve Bak's *Return To Genesis*, *Black Lamp* by Denton Designs, *Pandora* by Shahid Ahmad, the much-delayed *Star Trek: The Rebel Universe* by Mike Singleton, and Denton Designs and David Braben's 3D arcade blaster *Virus*, based upon his own Archimedes game *Zarch*. ST and Amiga versions of *Elite* appeared in the summer of 1988 by Mr Micro, with work starting soon after it had completed writing the final 8-bit version for the MSX.

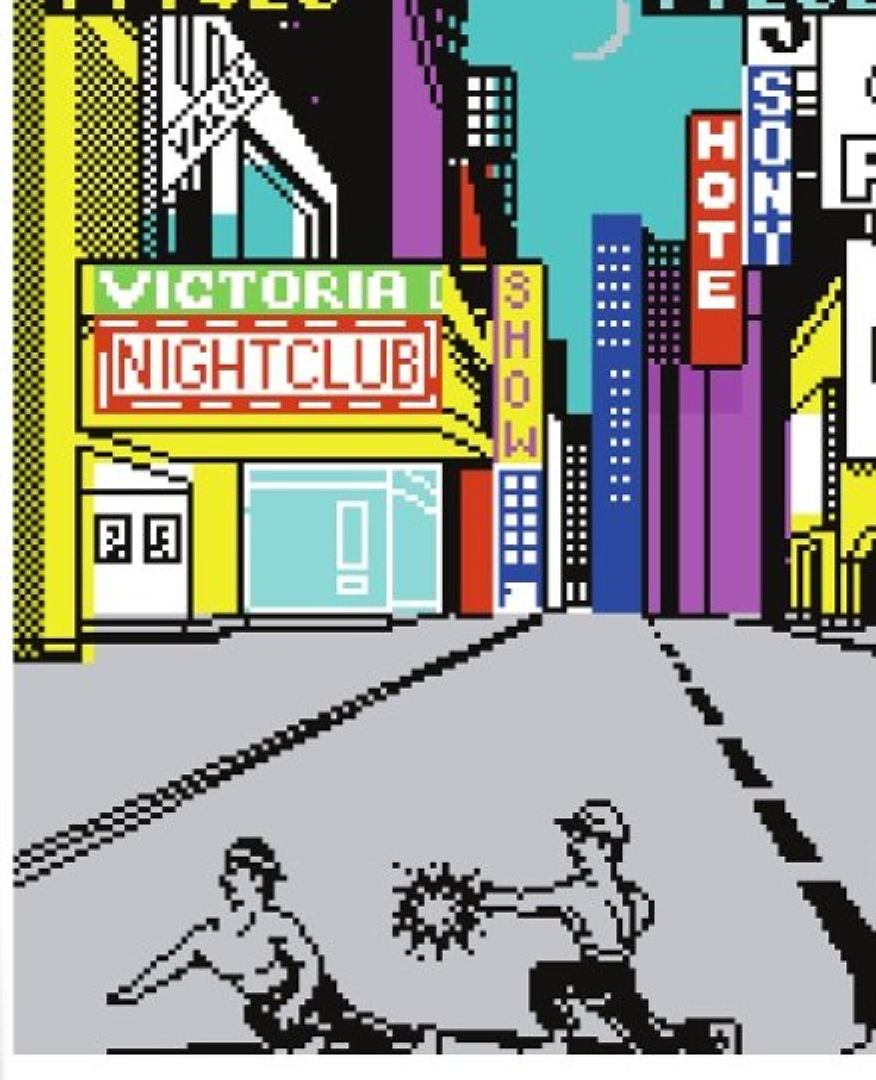
One final change was made to the budget range in early 1988: the line-up was finally given its own identity with the new Silverbird name. This new brand included diagonal striped packaging with a variety of coloured tints to distinguish between different price levels. Firebird was finally freed from the budget range that launched it, so an amended logo was introduced, with the wings pushed upwards in a more dynamic pose to reflect this new freedom. The Gold label had already been phased out, so at last the label was simply known as Firebird. Better late than never!

For sale

Despite chart successes with both full-price and budget games over the past four and a half years and a strong reputation, Telecomsoft was coming under close scrutiny from within BT. The business didn't really have any strategic fit, leading to a handful of internal moves in recent years from BT's New Information Services to Spectrum and then finally Dialcom. This situation resulted in BT management approaching general manager Paula Byrne in August 1988 and asking her to find potential purchasers for the company.



» The Firebird Silver budget range was relaunched as Silverbird in early 1988.



» [Amiga] *Return To Genesis* for the ST and Amiga was a slick shoot-'em-up from Steve Bak.



» [C64] *Elite* for the C64 was written by the original programmers for Firebird.

TESTING TIMES

The author of this article recalls: "I joined Telecomsoft in May 1988 as a games tester, working in the development department with colleagues Adrian Curry, Paul Coppins, Graeme Boxall, Jo Bonar, Dan Marchant, Gary Sheinwald, Colin Fuidge, Tim Roberts, Graham Wayne, Pete Moreland and Angela Sutherland. The first product I tested was Steve Turner's 48k Spectrum conversion of *Intensity*.

"By far the most popular Firebird games in the games room during my time there were *Rick Dangerous* and *Rainbow Islands*. It was particularly galling to see the latter go to rival publisher Ocean Software after Telecomsoft had been sold to MicroProse.

"Other memories include being sent to the arcades on Tottenham Court Road – just a few minutes' walk from our office in New Oxford Street – to check out the new games. All in the name of research, of course!

"I loved working for Telecomsoft and I look back on that period with great affection and huge nostalgia."

Further information about Telecomsoft can be found at **www.birdsanctuary.co.uk**



» [Spectrum] Beam Software's *Fist+* borrowed from a few other martial arts games.

It helped that it was deliberately a lot less financially interlinked with BT than it had been in the past, and that it was deemed financially strong enough to be an attractive proposition for a new owner.

Paula led a group of senior management in Telecomsoft – coincidentally all female – in attempting a management buyout from BT. The process was long, arduous and ultimately fruitless as neither party could reach an agreement. On 19 February 1989 the proposed MBO was abandoned, and so a press release was issued a few days later, announcing BT's intention to sell the business. It included a quote from Paula, where she described the company's current position in the industry.

"Telecomsoft is an established operation which has consistently improved its financial performance, culminating in last year's revenues of close on 6 million. The last two years have seen great achievement. As the foremost developer of 16-bit games software in Europe, with three strong brand names – Rainbird, Firebird and Silverbird – the organisation's business has never been stronger."

Talking to Paula today, she has nothing but good things to say of her time in charge of Telecomsoft: "I have so many happy memories. Running Telecomsoft was one of the best jobs anyone could have had and the team was just like a family to me."

A number of high-profile Firebird games were in development to entice a new owner, including Core's platformer *Rick Dangerous*, Paul Shirley's 16-bit shoot-'em-up *Quartz*, Nick Pelling's *3D Pool*, *Oriental Games* by Source, Geoff Crammond's *Stunt Car Racer*, Graftgold's *Bushido*, and a handful of coin-op conversions including *P-47 Thunderbolt*, *Action Fighter*, *Mr Heli*, and the *Bubble Bobble* sequel, *Rainbow Islands*.

A variety of suitors from the UK and abroad were interested in acquiring Telecomsoft, but in the end it was MicroProse that bought the company from BT for an undisclosed amount. It came as no real surprise to those working at Telecomsoft, as three of their former colleagues had joined the Tetbury-based publisher during the previous six months or so, including Rainbird publisher Paul Hibbard, operations manager Steve Perry, and senior development manager Pete Moreland.

The sale was concluded in early May 1989, and MicroProse then went into overdrive, quickly finishing and publishing all the games in development in order to get a quick return on its investment. Everyone at Telecomsoft was given a choice to either stay with BT or join the new owners. From a total of over 40, only a small handful elected to work for MicroProse. The rest either moved into mainstream BT or quickly found jobs elsewhere in the games industry.

Contractual problems caused by the change in ownership meant that the almost-finished conversions of Taito's *Rainbow Islands* written by Graftgold ended up going to rival publisher Ocean Software. MicroProse also switched *Oriental Games* and *Stunt Car Racer* from Firebird to its recently launched MicroStyle publishing label in an effort to boost its profile.

Another casualty of the sale was Silverbird. Budget software didn't really fit with the MicroProse product range, as UK managing director Stewart Bell explained at the time: "This is something of a problem for us. MicroProse are used to selling games in the top end of the market, costing over £20. It's a big jump from there down to the £1.99 category. It's early days at the moment and we're still not sure what we're going to do."

It wasn't too long before the new owner sold the label to Tudor Enterprises – a small tape-duplication outfit based in nearby Weston-Super-Mare.

The Firebird label only lasted another year or so. Tim Coupe's *Fire And Brimstone* for the Atari ST and Amiga was published in the summer of 1990. Little did anyone know that this tricky *Ghosts 'N Goblins*-inspired arcade game was Firebird's swansong. Another 16-bit futuristic sports title called *Fireball* was earmarked for Firebird, but the game was cancelled and the label was never used again.

» [Spectrum] *Invasion Of The Body Snatchas* for the Spectrum was called *Blow Out* when Firebird Silver republished it.

» [Amiga] Firebird released a number of 16-bit arcade games, including *Black Lamp* from Software Creations.



The release of *Star Wars: Dark Forces* in 1995 was a big deal. The DOS game not only proved to be an essential addition to the *Star Wars* universe, but also introduced many features to the first-person genre that are now taken for granted. The ability to crouch, look up and down and jump were all new to the genre, while the immersive storyline was a world away from those first-person shooters that had proceeded it. All in all, the force was definitely strong with this one.

KYLE KATARN

LucasArts originally intended for *Dark Forces'* hero to be Luke Skywalker. It was soon changed, however, and instead we got to witness the exploits of a gruff mercenary who turned his back on the Empire.

DARTH VADER

Although he's not really a key figure in *Dark Forces*, the Lord of the Sith nevertheless gets our blood stirring whenever he appears onscreen. Overseeing Mohc's project, he turns up at various parts of the game.

CRIX MADINE

Like Kyle Katarn, Madine was originally working for the Empire. He soon defects, however, and gives Kyle crucial information about the Dark Trooper materials that are being smuggled.

GENERAL MOHC

One of Vader's right-hand men is put in charge of the Dark Trooper's project, and does his best to thwart Kyle's progress. You eventually face him at the end of the final stage in full Dark Trooper regalia.



The Star Wars universe digitised

While previous *Star Wars* videogames did the franchise proud – most notably JVC's *Super Star Wars* for the SNES and *The Empire Strikes Back* on the Atari 2600 – they didn't really make you feel like you were an essential cog in the *Star Wars* universe. They were just really good games. *Dark Forces* did just that though, both through its constant use of the first-person perspective and the sheer amount of detail that had been crammed into the game. In fact, not since Atari's 1983 coin-op allowed you to blow up the Deathstar had the feeling of being a part of Lucas's universe been so well encapsulated in a game.



Danuta

Yes, it's the very first stage, but there's still something tremendously satisfying about replaying Operation Skyhook: Phase II. Looking like the Death Star and bringing back memories of the 1977 film, it's a fast-paced stage filled with Stormtroopers, Imperial Officers and other classic enemies. It's also a tight stage, with clever use of lifts and switches and a fair few secrets to discover. It certainly lacks the sense of scale and ambition that some of *Dark Forces'* later levels offer, but in terms of making you feel like you're part of the *Star Wars* universe LucasArts couldn't have started with a better opener.



Use the fist, Luke

There's a great array of weapons to use in *Dark Forces*, ranging from standard E-11 blaster rifles, commonly used by Stormtroopers, to the 'packered' mortar gun (rocket launcher to non-*Star Wars* fans), rifles and the powerful thermal detonator (grenade to *Call Of Duty* fans). All of them come with authentic sound effects and many of them are nice and weighty to use. If we're totally honest though, as good as *Dark Forces'* guns are, the real satisfaction comes from simply using Kyle's fists. There's something gratifying about punching a Stormtrooper in the face, and after 16 years it still hasn't gotten old.



Boba Fett

In addition to being the most ruthless bounty hunter in the galaxy, Boba Fett also happens to be the coolest, and has built up a massive following since his appearance in *The Empire Strikes Back*. With that in mind, LucasArts included him in *Dark Forces,* and the encounter did not disappoint. Effectively taking on the role of an end-of-level boss, the rocket pack equipped bounty hunter proves to be a right pain to take down, thanks to his excellent manoeuvrability and his extremely precise shots. Eventually you persevere though, leaving behind a bounty hunter with a wounded ego the size of a Sarlacc.



Dark Troopers

One of *Dark Forces'* strengths is that it's not afraid to pander to *Star Wars* fans. As a result there are plenty of well-known combatants, ranging from Imperial Stormtroopers to Gamorreans and Trandoshans. At one stage Kyle gets to battle several large Kell Dragons, but every enemy pales in comparison to the vicious and deadly Dark Trooper. The prototypes may look like Terminator rip-offs, but the finished models are not to be trifled with and can take huge amounts of punishment. They are certainly worthy adversaries and linger long in the memory.



Cut-scenes

Aside from its gameplay mechanics, one reason why *Dark Forces* felt so exciting at the time was its cut-scenes. Dovetailing nicely with the *Star Wars* universe – although not considered canon – LucasArts tell an absorbing tale that has ex-Imperial officer Kyle Katarn teaming up with the rebel alliance. After retrieving the Death Star plans in *Dark Forces'* exciting opening he uncovers the secret of the Empire's Dark Trooper project. Perfectly paced and featuring strong performances and John Williams' wondrous score, it's so well put together that it felt like watching footage from an undiscovered *Star Wars* film.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** DOS
- **PUBLISHER:** LUCASARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

What the press said… ages ago



Game Spot 7.6/10
One of the first titles to actually improve upon the Doom formula. Dark Forces managed to rise above "me-too" status and become a great game in its own right."

PC Gamer, 92%
It's easily the best first-person shooter since Doom, and a must for Star Wars fans everywhere.

What we think

Its sequels may have improved on its core formulae, but the original *Dark Forces* remains a superb blaster and an important addition to the FPS genre.



John Newcomer

What cherished games would you take to the island?

From Joust to NBA Jam, John Newcomer was a key creative figure at Williams during its arcade heyday. Paul Drury mines for sinisite crystals and ends up as buzzard bait…

For the young John Newcomer, Mother knew best. That's Mother's Arcade, a charmingly dishevelled videogame joint in Mount Prospect, Chicago.

"It was a dump but it was our dump and we loved it," recalls John, wistfully. "It was full of new games, bunched up against each other and so crowded you could hardly move. People would pile up tokens on the machines' marquees to get in the queue to play. Game designers from Gottlieb, Williams, Bally, Stern and Midway would always be there; people like Tim Skelly, Dave Nutting and Steve Ritchie. I knew it was what I wanted to get into."

The blinking lights of this brave new digital world were a far cry from his rural upbringing. John grew up in Indiana, near the Michigan border, surrounded by farmland rather than strip malls. He studied industrial design at Notre Dame, which mixed mechanical engineering with art and design and proved to be good preparation for a career in toy design. After college, he joined a think tank headed by Gordon Barlow, the mind behind the beloved board game *Mousetrap*, and during the late Seventies and early Eighties, worked on numerous board and handheld electronic games, including the duck-dunking *Splish Splash* for Hasbro and *Pro Electric Bowling* for Cadaco, which received a Japanese release through Bandai. When *Space Invaders* landed, John recognised that the bleeps and bloops of simple LED games were numbered, and after being introduced to Williams' vice president, Ken Fedesna, at a Chicago trade show, he plucked up the courage and dropped off his CV in person.

"I delivered my resume stuffed down the throat of a rubber chicken," says John, casually. "It was kind of a test. I wanted whoever I worked for to have a sense of humour and playfulness. I thought that would make them a stronger company."



Both parties passed the test and John began at Williams after Thanksgiving in 1981. The company had only recently returned to the videogame business after a brief post-*Pong* flirtation and had experienced huge success with *Defender*. However, on his arrival, John found the atmosphere less than celebratory. "It was kind of tense," he notes. "Eugene [Jarvis] and Larry [DeMar] had just left to form Vid Kidz and were starting *Robotron*. Williams was soul-searching, like, 'Jeez, where are we going to get our ideas?' The programmers were still doing the coding, game design and the art and the company had no sense of control. Like, how can we make a business plan if we don't know where our next game is coming from and when it's going to be done?"

John's appointment was timely, coming from a related industry but not as a programmer, and he was duly tasked with putting together "a harbour chest of ideas". His opening quartet of game designs included *War Of The Worlds*, the favourite of Williams president Mike Stroll, but the team felt they weren't technically ready to do the concept justice. Instead, they opted for the giant bird-riding pitch of *Joust*. With John in charge of the project and overall game design, Bill Pfutzenreuter handling the coding, and artist Jan Hendricks doing a fine job in pixellating your feathered steeds, the team produced a wonderfully original, engaging arcade hit.

> **Trivia**
> ***Sinistar* was given the nickname 'Opie-Star' inside Williams, due to the game's famous 'Run, Coward' taunt sounding rather like 'Ron Howard', who played Opie Taylor in *The Andy Griffith Show*.**

"I want you to care," exclaims John. "If the player is connected to what they're controlling, then I've got them. If you can't relate to the main character you're not going to relate to the game. What made *Joust* work so well is the flap button. Now you have a physical connection as well as an emotional one. You felt one with what you were controlling."

It was a winning combination, but initially at least, Williams was less sure of its hatchling. "The confidence of the company in *Joust* was low," recalls John. "They field-tested it way out in an ice rink on the outskirts of Chicago. They weren't going to test it at Mother's in case it didn't go down well, which would kill it with distributors. It was hard to tell if it would be successful but then I saw a couple of kids play it, give it the finger, but then keep coming back. That's always a good sign!"



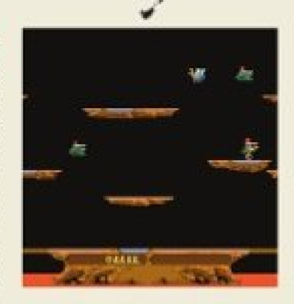
“I delivered my resume to Williams stuffed down the throat of a rubber chicken”

John sees if his prospective employers were good eggs

The Joust cocktail cabinet under construction at Williams' manufacturing plant in Gurnee, Illinois

Timeline

JOUST
■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
John's wildly original, winged debut introduced the art of flapping into arcades and remains a classic. Can you craftily kill the pterodactyl?



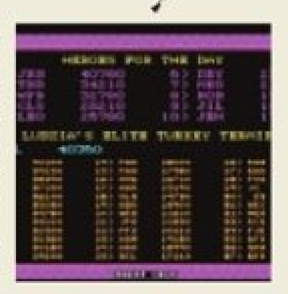
SPLAT!
■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
This food-fighting oddity was fun when played with a friend and, like *Joust*, a special cocktail cabinet allowed side-by-side play.



SINISTAR
■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
Beware, it lives! John's design for *Juggernaut* laid the groundwork for one of Williams' finest and longest-lasting arcade titles.



TURKEY SHOOT
■ **YEAR:** 1984
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
Become a turkey terminator and watch the feathers fly. Still the only arcade game to feature a 'gobble' button, notably.



The Team On Newcomer

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about John's games...





Darran Jones
If I had to choose one game out of John's career it would have to be the rather excellent *Sinistar*. Taking elements from other popular shooters is tricky enough, but *Sinistar* successfully manages it. A frantic twitch shooter that's still a joy to play.





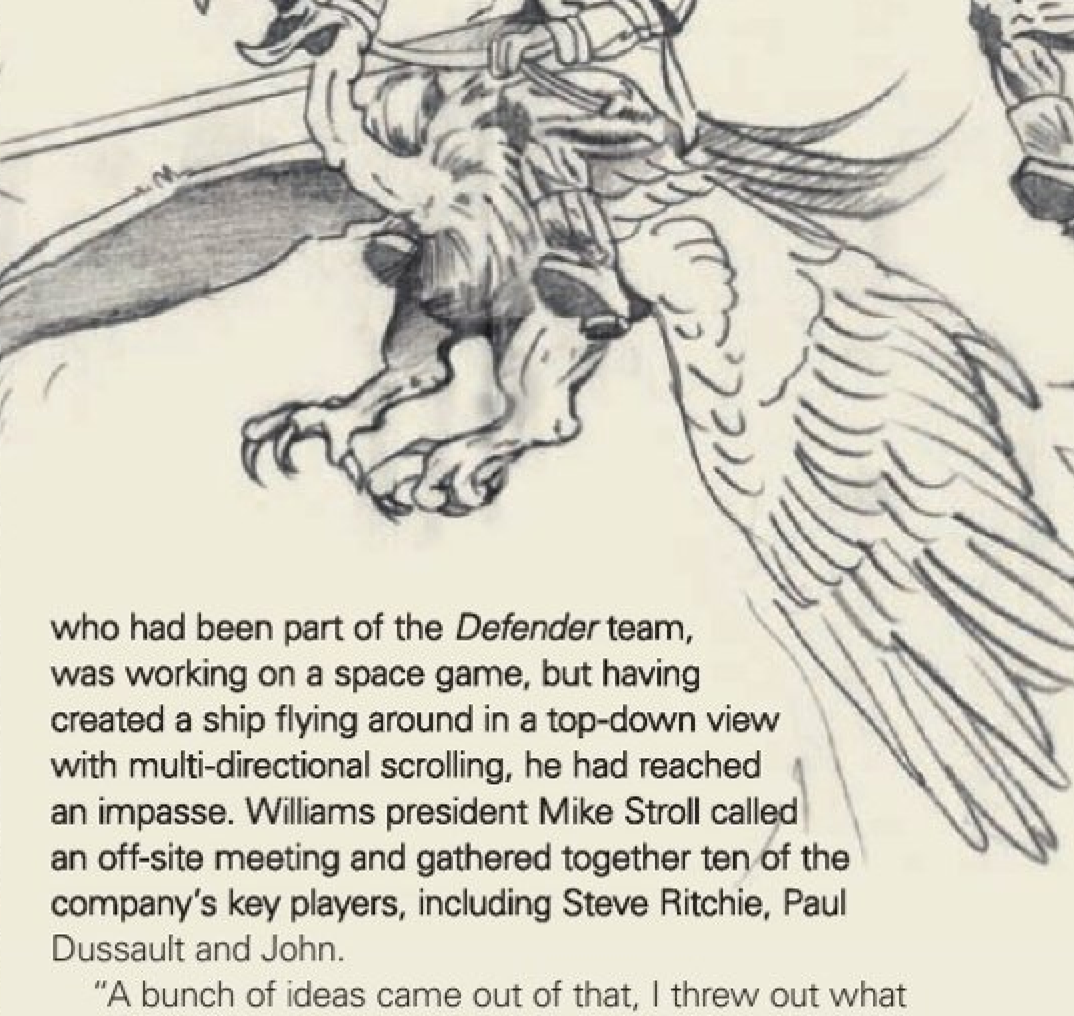
Paul Drury
For over 20 years, John was a major creative force at Williams, and *Joust* and *Sinistar* in particular are some of my favourite titles from the golden age of the arcade. Plus he has sent me the original, hand-written design document for *Juggernaut*, so I am forever in his debt.





Stuart Hunt
Of John's games, *Joust*, *Sinistar* and *Revolution X* had the most impact on me. *Joust* was a great concept and proved that you didn't need spaceships and bullets for a successful game. And *Sinistar* is rightly regarded as one of the most terrifying shooters of all time – until *Revolution X* came along.





» One of John's concept art sketches for *Joust*

The success of this left-field title encouraged Williams to take risks on more unusual game concepts, which may explain John's next project, *Splat!*. Inspired by a childhood diet of *Looney Tunes* cartoons and *The Three Stooges*, the game involved a deadly food fight and frequent pie-related decapitation, which proved especially entertaining when pelting a friend with edible ammunition. "I always felt games would evolve into something more social," says John. "Even though this was a very minor start, I wanted to see if I could encourage some social play and, of course, it would benefit the cashbox if it took off. But the timing wasn't right and I knew it just wasn't fun enough."

Fortunately, John's next title would not only be huge fun; it would bring a new emotion into arcades: fear. Sam Dicker, who had been part of the *Defender* team, was working on a space game, but having created a ship flying around in a top-down view with multi-directional scrolling, he had reached an impasse. Williams president Mike Stroll called an off-site meeting and gathered together ten of the company's key players, including Steve Ritchie, Paul Dussault and John.

"A bunch of ideas came out of that, I threw out what I didn't like, kept what I did and drew up *Juggernaut*," he explains. "During the next round of hiring programmers, Noah Falstein was given the project and the rest is history. He got it. He took it and made it his own."

The game was renamed *Sinistar* and, taking the concept of mining asteroids for crystals and balancing the immediate threat of enemy ships while being aware of a greater future threat in the form of a giant metallic juggernaut that was under construction, Noah and his team created one of videogaming's first truly terrifying bosses. John had moved up into a more managerial position as head of Williams' art department and thus had a less hands-on role in the game's creation. We note that the original design document included such ideas as multiple sinistars being built simultaneously, commanded by 'warlords' that fled in escape pods when their ships were destroyed, pursued by eager players. Was John disappointed that he didn't have more control over the final game?

"I might have done a few things differently, like structuring the levels so they weren't so repetitive and having more adventure missions," he answers. "But no, Noah and I were good friends, I trusted him and he did a great job."

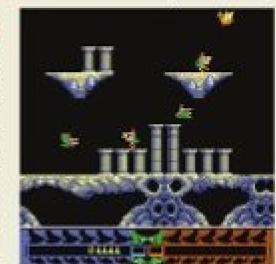
John was to take a more active interest in his next project, the surreal lightgun blaster *Turkey Shoot*. Defeating the mutant birds with sharp shooting and judicious use of the 'gobble' button was rewarded by actual turkey feathers billowing across the screen. "I wanted a gimmick," he giggles. "That shows my toy design background. It added cost and so there was a debate whether to keep it in. I heard Mike Stroll was about to kill it, so I hired a singing telegram in a turkey costume to turn up at a staff meeting.

> "I thought NARC felt less like a war on drugs and more like a celebration"
>
> *John just says no to Mr Big*

John reads the manual in his office at Williams HQ on Kedzie Avenue, Chicago, in March 1983

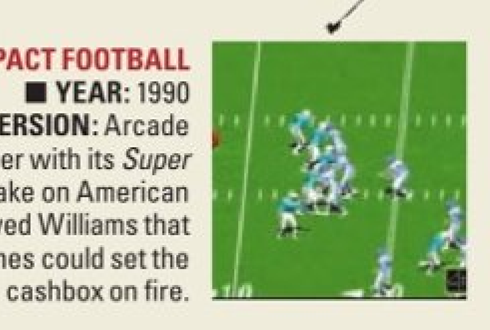
1986

JOUST 2
■ **YEAR:** 1986
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
A troubled development, meddling marketing and limited release mean many have missed out on this intriguing, if brutal, title.



1990

HIGH IMPACT FOOTBALL
■ **YEAR:** 1990
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
Together with its *Super* sequel, this take on American football showed Williams that sports games could set the cashbox on fire.



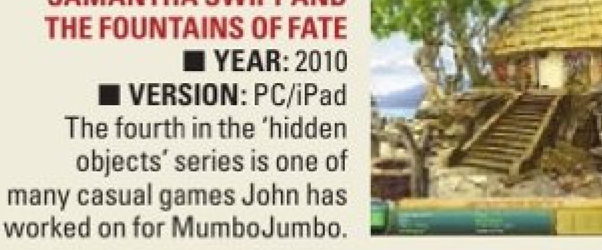
1996

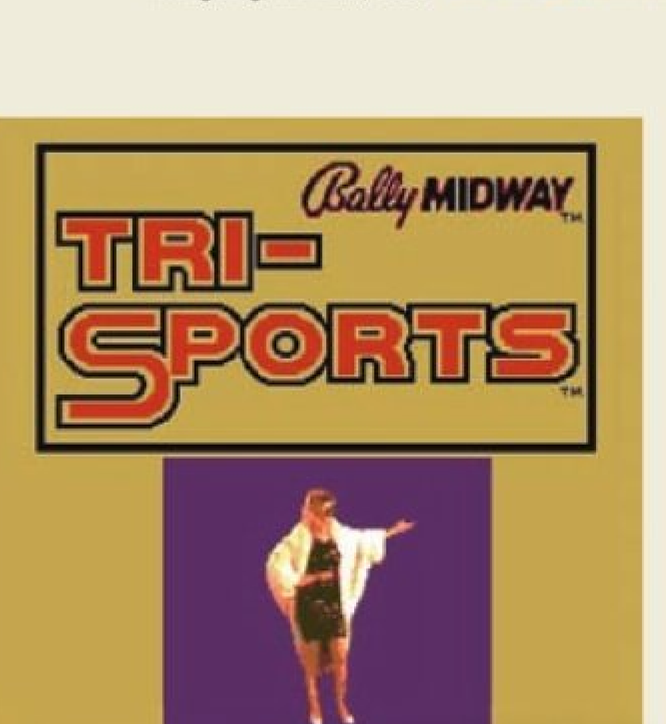
TOUCHMASTER
■ **YEAR:** 1996
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
You know those ubiquitous touch screen casual gaming machines you find in every Wetherspoons pub? This is the great granddaddy.



2010

SAMANTHA SWIFT AND THE FOUNTAINS OF FATE
■ **YEAR:** 2010
■ **VERSION:** PC/iPad
The fourth in the 'hidden objects' series is one of many casual games John has worked on for MumboJumbo.







Gee whiz, Professor!

In the early Nineties, pinball experienced something of a revival in popularity, with Williams, a distinguished stalwart of the industry, leading the charge. In 1991, it released *Gilligan's Island*, the first table to boast a dot matrix display.

"They didn't have artists in the pinball department so had to borrow people from videogames," explains John. "I thought it'd be fun to try it, plus I'd seen every episode of the TV show. The challenge was to make something out of nothing. People were only doing 'turn it on, turn if off' and I thought: 'Why can't you turn it half on?'" The technicians made some modifications and John was able to create impressive likenesses of the hapless castaways.

The guy in the suit got on his knees and pleaded for them to stay in."

John was granted his wish this time but things were changing at Williams. The videogames division had now become Bally Midway and, disappointed with some management decisions, he left to join Mylstar in 1984. He began work on two innovative projects: a multiplayer *Space Wars*-style game, with one master unit and up to seven 'slave' units attached, giving individual players their own control panels; and *Bandit*, a videogame/fruit machine hybrid. Sadly, a mere five months after his arrival, the firm went bust.

"Boy that one pissed me off," mutters John. "The games were halfway done and I thought they should have found some money to at least finish *Bandit* and sell it to another company. That game was something different…"

Upset but undeterred, John returned to his former employer and got straight back on the bird, leading the team tasked with creating a sequel to *Joust*. "That wasn't exactly my idea," he acknowledges. "It was getting hard to sell any game at that time, so the sales department wanted a sequel to lessen the risk. Vid Kidz didn't want to do a *Stargate* or *Robotron* sequel so that left *Joust*. It was like that army thing, where everyone steps backwards and you find yourself at the front."

John valiantly soldiered on, producing the imaginative, if incredibly demanding, *Joust 2*, which allowed you to switch between ostrich and Pegasus, introducing new strategies and challenges. The project faced problems from the beginning, though, with original *Joust* coder Bill Pfutzenreuter unavailable, marketing insisting that the game should adopt a portrait rather than landscape aspect ratio so that they could sell it as a conversion kit, and the industry as a whole being in a major slump. "*Joust* began as 'Do what you want and we'll see you in six months'," recalls John. "With *Joust 2*, there were all these design parameters on it. I felt I had an arm tied behind my back."

These were hard times and Bally Midway turned to drugs to ease the pain, in the form of *NARC*. The project, led by Eugene Jarvis who had also returned to Williams' relaunched coin-op division, took a rather literal interpretation of President Reagan's War On Drugs, allowing you to waste legions of syringe-toting junkies. "I was actually against that game," reveals John, who helped out with some of the artwork. "I thought it felt less like a war on drugs and more like a celebration. I thought the enemies, the dealers, were the coolest characters."

Though uncomfortable with the game's theme, he enjoyed getting to grips with the new hardware, which introduced digitised graphics to the arcades. John was, however, moving into a new area for games. "Sales were saying they needed a game for bars – that was where the market was, but most of the designers didn't want to touch it because they thought those games were boring. I thought I'd take a crack at it."

Rising to the challenge, and possibly looking forward to the field-testing, John led the *Tri-Sports* project, which combined trackball-controlled versions of bowling, mini golf and pool. It was a moderate success when released in 1989



Newcomer on Newcomer

John picks his three favourite projects from his long career



■ **JOUST**

Not only my first videogame but my most creative one, I think. I had a lot of fun making it and I really enjoyed working with Bill Pfutzenreuter. Plus, I liked the subject matter.



■ **HIGH IMPACT FOOTBALL**

I'm a football junkie and I love sports games. It was a hard sell in the company to do it and so it was very gratifying that when it got out, so many other people enjoyed playing it.



■ **TOUCHMASTER INFINITY**

Doing a casual game for the bar crowd was a new and different challenge. It was fun to do a pack of games where you can do a variety of game styles and appeal to different markets.





Readers' Questions

Merman: Do you think a sports game can ever really capture the sport it portrays?
Yes! You have to put yourself into it. When I play *Madden* or even *NBA Jam*, I'm playing like a kid. I'm picturing myself as the hero of the all-star game. I think it becomes hard to capture the sport when a game takes itself too seriously. I don't want to see the huddle and the boring parts. I want to see the human highlights film. The more they capture that, then they capture the spirit of the game.

Miketendo: Did you work directly with Aerosmith on *Revolution X* and how much input did they have?
I hung out with them for one evening. It was in the contract that they would be digitised. Part of the game is finding each band member and at the end of the game you get to hang out with them backstage. I did the art for that. They were really cool. At that time they were total health nuts: slim and trim and on top of their game. They wanted catering to do sushi for them!

Paranoid Marvin: Did you try to get the original team back together to create *Joust 2*?
I wanted Bill but he wanted to do pinball at the time. The other original members weren't there any more!

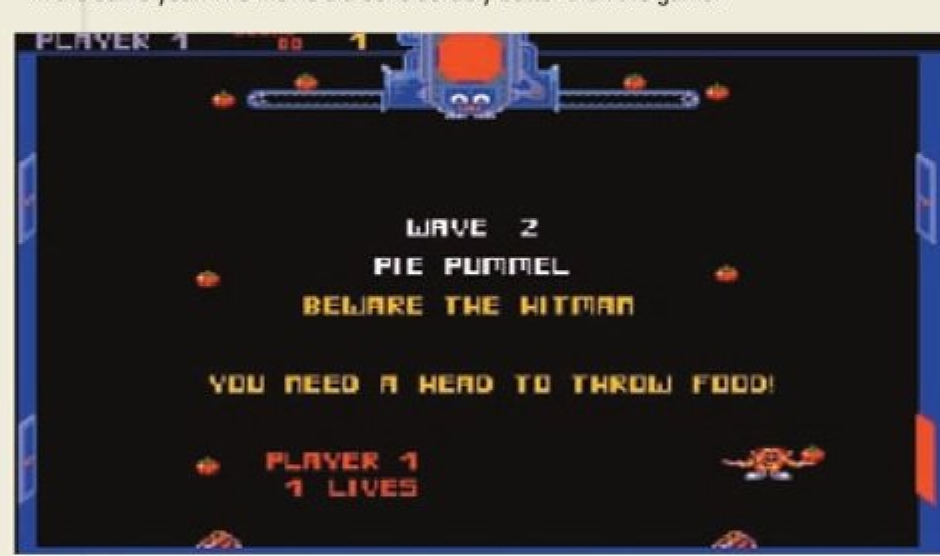
Northway: What do you think of the *Joust* tribute in *World Of Warcraft: Cataclysm*?
It's flattering just to see it. I have nothing bad to say about it. To have anything like that in *World Of Warcraft* you've got to say thank you! End of story. As an aside, the nearest thing to seeing *Joust* in 3D as I'd imagined it was watching *Avatar*. Seeing the floating islands and the characters riding giant birds. That put me forever at ease about not doing a 3D sequel.

JSW: What was your inspiration for *Sinistar* and what did you think of *Sinistar Unleashed*, released in 1999?
The inspiration came from that meeting we spoke about. The giant skull was inspired by something – I wish I could remember what. As for *Sinistar Unleashed*, I didn't play it!

» [Arcade] The first arcade game to feature digitised graphics and a 32-bit processor, *NARC* took the War On Drugs to the streets, all guns blazing…



» [Arcade] *Splat!*'s Tanya Tootsie character was a nod to the Dustin Hoffman film released in the same year. The movie did considerably better than the game.



and John would further develop the sporting theme with *High Impact Football* and its sequel, collaborating with Ed '*Mortal Kombat*' Boon on both titles.

"The earnings in the arcade were ridiculous," says John "The first *High Impact Football* was making $1,000 a week, double the second-highest earner. The thing that killed us was that it took longer to develop than planned and came out after the Super Bowl. Sales thought they couldn't sell it, but the cash boxes were still overflowing."

A success in its own right, the *High Impact* series' greatest contribution to Williams may have been in convincing it that a sports title that emphasised fun and accessibility over realism could be a winning formula. "It blazed a trail," smiles John. "The company didn't want to do a sports game. It was a hard sell but when *Football* did so well it meant the *NBA Jam* concept got instant approval. That was Mark Turmell's baby. He put his heart and soul into that."

And everyone else put their quarters into it, making *NBA Jam* one of the biggest games of its time, reputedly taking in $1 billion in coins alone. John is quick to point out that his input to the final game was only minor, but he contributed enough for his digitised head to be secretly coded into the game along with the rest of the design team. He also lent his artistic talents to the Aerosmith-based oddity *Revolution X* before going back to the bar for 1996's *Touchmaster*, a collection of casual games for the drinking classes. "It was an experimental project and a lot of people didn't want to touch it," explains John. "It wasn't a big, glamorous game that would sell tens of thousands. It was something you plugged at over years, updating it, pitching in with new ideas. Casual games are totally different animals. Your customer base isn't kids; it's adults. Your biggest group of players are bar staff, which means a lot of female players and a lot of people didn't even know what a touch screen was! You had to educate the player and make all the controls really intuitive."

What John learned through the project and its sequel, *Touchmaster Infinity*, he's been applying ever since. During the last decade, he's worked on phone games, such as *MotoGP* and *Golden Tee Advance*, and is currently director of games at MumboJumbo, producing casual titles for the PC and mobile devices. "I like it a lot," he grins. "The development cycle is much shorter and you're not stuck doing a game for two years and then, God forbid, it doesn't fly." His role also allows him to dip into different game styles, from 'hidden object' adventures like the *Midnight Mysteries* series to the undead action of *Zombie Bowl-O-Rama*.

So, after three decades in the industry, does he still get a kick out of it? "It's what I've always wanted to do and I still find it fun," he smiles. "I'm still just a big kid."

As George Bernard Shaw noted, you don't stop playing because you grow old; you grow old because you stop playing…



Trivia

Being a huge Chicago Bears fan, John based the coach in *High Impact Football* on their legendary coach Mike Ditka, as a tribute to his beloved team.





A sketch for John's War Of The Worlds game concept, pitched at the same time as Joust but never pursued



> "I saw kids give Joust the finger but keep coming back. That's always a good sign" *John knew Joust was the one…*

John Newcomer's

Desert Island Disks

The games that John just couldn't live without and why he loves them


01


02


03


04


05


06


07


08

01 **Robotron: 2084** ARCADE

It's an impossible task to keep this to eight games, but I'll try. *Robotron* is my favourite. So full of action it makes your palms sweat. You can get out of impossible situations. I guess the hope is that if I can get through the Grunt wave, I can get rescued from the island!

02 **Chessmaster** PC

If *Robotron* is my favourite videogame, chess is my favourite game. I would never get tired of playing it. I can play at any skill level, I can have unlimited opponents, and as I lose my grip on reality I would pretend they're real.

03 **The Sims** PC

Only because of the desert island theme. I need someone to talk to! It would help me stay sane. Actually, it would probably make me go insane, talking to these little characters, giving them names and lives, playing with a society, even though it's a weird computer one…

04 **Madden 07** XBOX 360

I love sports and *Madden*'s the best. *Madden 07* was the last one I played intensely. Madden has to be the commentator. When they got rid of him it was disappointing. Well, he got rid of himself, I guess.

05 **Golden Tee** ARCADE

Give me the version with the most golf courses and I can play it for a long time without getting bored. It's fun as a single-player game and I would look to Incredible Technologies [the developer] to hook me up and find me.

06 **Unreal Tournament** PC

I'd be stuck playing bots on the island, which is unfortunate. I guess I'd have to teach the monkeys and crabs how to play. If I could get online I could get someone to come rescue me, too. And on an island, you need something to shoot the snot out of to keep you sane!

07 **Virtua Fighter 4** ARCADE

I could play it a long time, win the whole cycle with every character. It'd keep me interested. A good game to relieve my frustrations.

08 **Mah Jong** PC

I can't really explain it. It's just addictive. There are two ways I play it. In my downtime when I go home, I find myself playing it slowly, to relax. I savour it. Then sometimes, I play it as fast as I can and try to beat it in under two minutes.



Gods

DEMIGOD AND MONSTERS

» RETROREVIVAL

» AMIGA
» THE BITMAP BROTHERS
» 1991

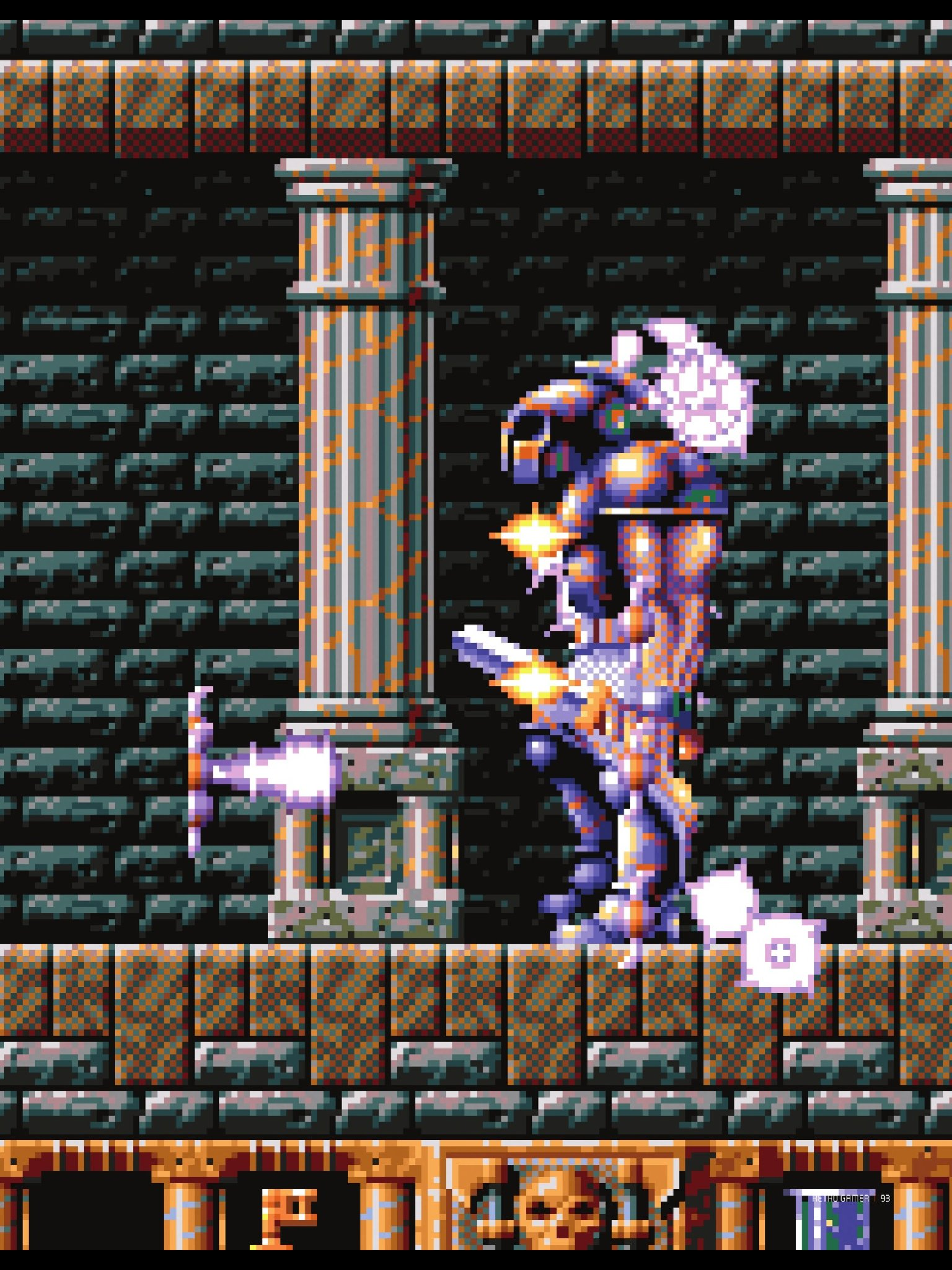
I might be wrong, but aren't gods meant to be all-powerful beings? Surely, if they wanted to, they could transmute you into a spot on a baboon's arse, and then telepathically tell that baboon to rub arses with another baboon to kill you. Put another way, if you want to pick a fight with a god then you either better be pretty good mates with one… or, better still, you better be one.

Well, according to the story behind the classic Bitmap Brothers game *Gods* this isn't the case at all. When the citadel of the gods comes under siege by four large end-of-level guardians, rather than simply use one of their giant-sandaled feet to flatten them to dust they instead place an advert in the Olympus Beagle asking wannabe heroes to save their castle. The deal-clincher is that the gods will grant their saviour a seat beside them if he completes his task.

Gods was the Bitmaps' follow-up to the excellent *Speedball 2* and, though living in completely different genres, there are clear parallels to be found between both games. The undeniable Greek influences behind *Speedball*'s fictional future sport are pushed centre stage here, and once again we also got to steer around a hero who's a fan of wearing body armour and face-obscuring helmets – although this time one who couldn't rely on assistance from his burly teammates.

Gods was a tough side-scrolling shooter in the vein of Capcom's *Magic Sword* and *Magician Lord*. It features labyrinthine levels with multiple paths, levers to pull, doors to unlock and plenty of enemies to vanquish. And though the game only had four stages – divided into three smaller sections – it was certainly no walk in the park. Often it wasn't made clear where you had to go; enemies would come out of the walls, and the volume and ferocity at which they did so would increased with each level. They would also get really quite cunning, thanks to the game's impressive AI.

Though I always found the controls a little fiddly and Herc is rubbish at multitasking, *Gods* remains one of my all-time favourite Amiga games. It has the visuals, music, and atmosphere to keep me coming back for more. *

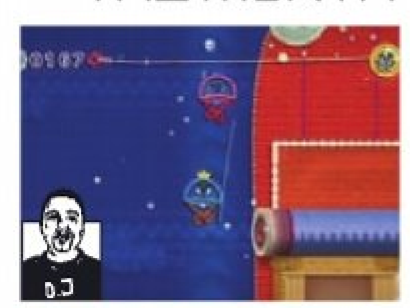


>> KIRBY'S EPIC YARN



>> We were hoping to highlight the relevant 3DS launch titles this month, but timing made it impossible to do so. Fortunately, Kirby's Epic Yarn and Hard Corps Uprising more than filled the 3D gap.

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Kirby's Epic Yarn
Taking me back to my SNES days, it's a heavenly platformer that does Kirby proud.



STUART
Kirby's Epic Yarn
It's a solid, enchanting, imaginative and beautiful-looking platform game.



DAVID
Hard Corps: Uprising
Hard Corps by name, hard core by nature. *Contra* gets a well-timed, if rather tough, update.

INFORMATION

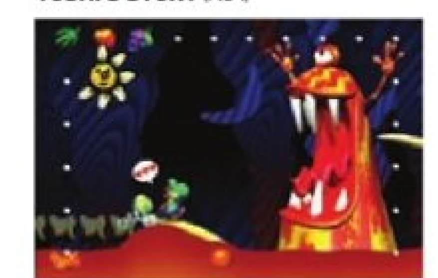
- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** NINTENDO WII
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** NA
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £39.99
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** HAL LABORATORY/GOOD-FEEL
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

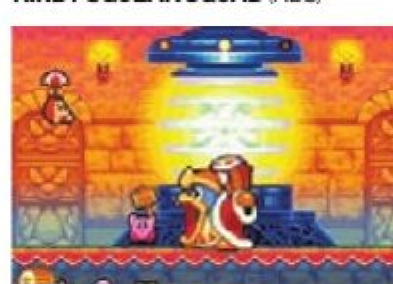
» Kirby was created by Masahiro Sakurai and appeared in *Kirby's Dream Land* on Nintendo's Game Boy. Since then he's starred in a number of platformers, and various spin-off titles including *Super Smash Bros.*, *Kirby's Air Ride* and *Kirby's Pinball Land*. *Kirby's Epic Yarn* is his first platform game on a home console since *Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards*.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
YOSHI'S STORY (N64)



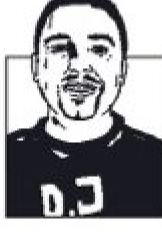
▽ SOMETHING NEW
KIRBY SQUEAK SQUAD (NDS)



Kirby's Epic Yarn

retro GAMER SIZZLER

NINTENDO'S PINK MASCOT RETURNS IN AN ADVENTURE OF EPIC PROPORTIONS



It's been 11 long years since Kirby last appeared in a proper platform game on a home console. He's certainly been busy on handhelds thanks to the likes of *Canvas Curse* and *Squeak Squad*, but we yearned for something bigger, bolder, something a little more epic than his handheld adventures. Fortunately for us, Hal Laboratory has obviously been listening, and has arguably delivered not only the best *Kirby* game we've played for a very long time, but also one of the best 2D platformers available on any current-gen system.

Everything about *Kirby's Epic Yarn* is simply wonderful. Its pacing is superb, continually introducing new forms and game mechanics, while the level design is some of the best around. It's also a world away from traditional *Kirby* games, mainly because Kirby and the world he inhabits are now made of yarn.

Being made of string means that Kirby is no longer able to suck up enemies and use their abilities, something he's been doing since… well, forever. Instead, the cute amorphous blob tackles his environment by transforming into a number of useful objects and creatures. A double tap left or right gives him a burst of speed in the form of a cute car, double tapping the jump button turns him into a parachute, while pressing down turns Kirby into his traditional anvil form. Things really take off though when the Kirbster is sucked into certain areas and transformed into a huge array of different vehicles and creatures. There's a snowboarding penguin, a beach buggy, a cute dolphin, a UFO and many other forms. All of them control completely differently to each other, while many greatly impact on how you tackle certain levels; turning into a buggy, for example, enables you to

»[Wii] The bosses of *Epic Yarn* don't only look beautiful, they feature surprisingly inventive attack patterns as well.





»[Wii] Visually, *Kirby's Epic Yarn* looks absolutely stunning. If only more games were this inventive with their design.

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Kirby's Epic Yarn

>> A new *Kirby* game is already in development for Wii. Unlike *Epic Yarn* it's a traditional *Kirby* title.

>> Collecting all three items on certain stages or defeating bosses without taking damage sometimes results in new levels.

>> Kirby was originally designed as a dummy character named Popopo. He became so popular that the designers left him in.









With friends like these…

ONE OF THE best aspects of *Kirby's Epic Yarn* is its excellent two-player mode. Taking control of Prince Fluff, the second player has all the same strengths and weaknesses as Kirby, but it's now possible to work as a team to more easily navigate certain areas of the game. See an out-of-the-way area that's impossible to reach? Simply lasso your friend and throw him up there. It doesn't greatly change the core mechanics of each level, but it does make the experience a lot of fun. Kirby's friends also pop up in a simple side game that sees Kirby trying to find a set number of the little scamps within a strict time limit.

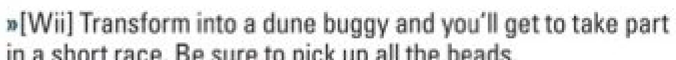
OPINION

For me, *Epic Yarn* harks back to the golden age of the platform genre. And while its appearance and challenge are clearly pitched towards younger gamers, I think older fans will find plenty here to enjoy… even if Kirby is dieting. Finding the collectibles and the gems poses a test, and its imaginative design make it wonderfully entertaining. It's short but utterly charming.

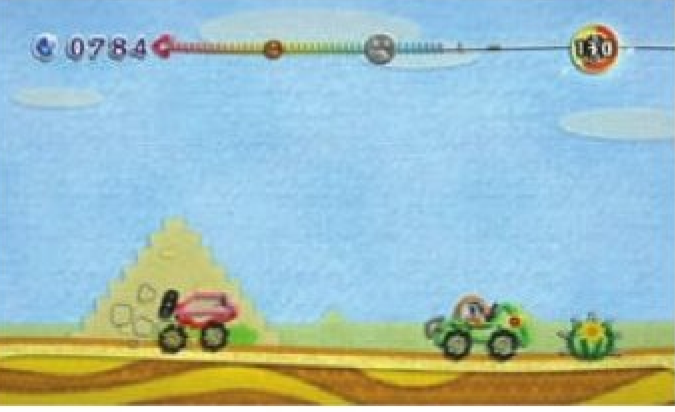
Stuart Hunt

take part in some fun racers, while some later stages take the form of vertical and horizontal shoot-'em-ups.

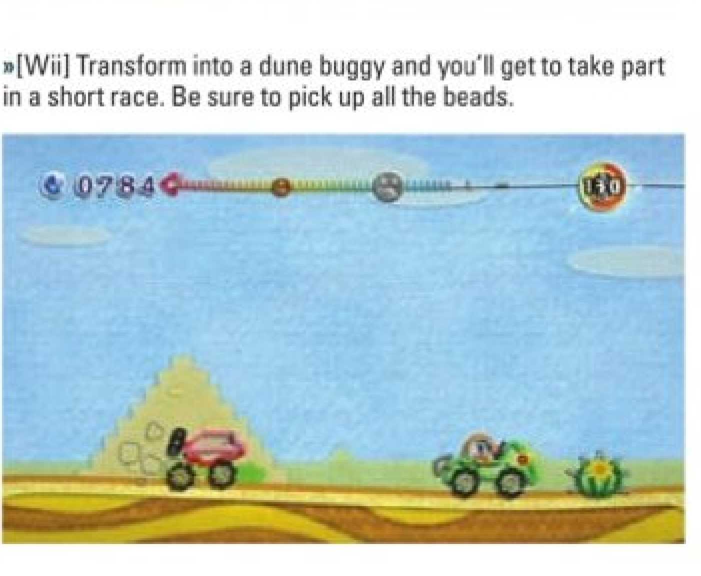
The sheer amount of imagination on offer in *Kirby's Epic Yarn* is simply wonderful to see, while the gorgeous felt and canvas-filled world proves that you don't need state-of-the-art high-definition visuals to create something that looks absolutely amazing and full of character and warmth. Indeed, the astonishing visuals and clever integration of *Epic Yarn*'s mechanics go a long way towards making this game so adorable to actually play. It's been a long time since we've played a game that caused us to have a grin etched constantly across our faces, but *Kirby's Epic Yarn* manages it effortlessly.



»[Wii] Transform into a dune buggy and you'll get to take part in a short race. Be sure to pick up all the beads.



»[Wii] Completing a level awards you with a patch that opens up a new part of the stage.



Part of this enjoyment comes from how Kirby is so well integrated into his new game world. Whereas most platformers tend to focus on the character that occupies them, the tangible world of *Epic Yarn* is just as much a star as Kirby himself. Sections can be unzipped to create new areas, items are cleverly hidden under peel-away patches, portals can be used to place you behind the game world – creating a lovely effect as you see Kirby's body pushing against the fabric of the canvas world – while strategically placed buttons enable you to reach otherwise inaccessible areas.

Another interesting aspect of *Kirby's Epic Yarn* is the way the game's difficulty has been implemented. As with many *Kirby* titles, the core game is as fluffy as a cloud, requiring very little effort to actually complete. In fact, we breezed through it in under six hours. The beauty of the level design lies in the beads and items that are judiciously scattered through each stage. As with the *Lego* series, which saw you gathering studs to boost your score, collecting beads represents your overall rating once a level is finally completed. It's easy enough to get through a stage, but getting through a level with enough beads for a gold rating (get hit and you lose beads, *Sonic*-style) is another matter entirely. Add in three hidden items on each stage – used to furnish your house – and getting 100 per cent on each level suddenly becomes quite a difficult task.

Kirby's Epic Yarn is simply a wonderful throwback to the days of 16-bit gaming, a time where inventiveness and exploration always took precedence over aesthetics (although *Kirby* also has these bases impressively covered). With its clever boss encounters, meticulous level design and a wonderful surprise after your encounter with Meta Knight, Hal Laboratories' game is a clear triumph, and proves that the 2D platform genre is far from dead. If *Donkey Kong Country Returns* saw Retro Studios putting the soul back into the platformer, then *Kirby's Epic Yarn* represents the heart that so many recent games seem to have misplaced recently.

In a nutshell

Packed with imagination and featuring truly beautiful aesthetics, *Kirby's Epic Yarn* is perfect proof that creative and clever ideas will always triumph over cutting-edge technology.

>> Scores

Presentation	88%
Graphics	94%
Sound	92%
Playability	92%
Addictivity	88%
Overall	**91%**



» [Xbox 360] There are some nice action set piece moments scattered throughout the game, including the hackneyed giant boulder escape.

HARD BY NAME, CONTRA BY NATURE

Hard Corps: Uprising



Still smarting over the fact that Konami decided not to release the excellent *Contra 4* in Europe, we were beginning to think that *Contra* and our homeland might have had something of a lovers' tiff.

Well, it seems we were wrong and a little bit hasty with our belief. Their relationship is very much still on, even if Konami seems to be sneaking the game into the territory – this is a *Contra* game in every respect other than name.

Once again Konami has entrusted *Contra* to a third-party, namely Arc System Works. Famous for the *Guilty Gear* and *BlazBlue* series, Arc has given *Contra* a stunning anime facelift in the style of those aforementioned games. While the new look will probably split opinion among fans, after spending a few hours in *Uprising*'s company you quickly realise that it is a *Contra* game in every other respect.

A great many of the key gameplay series staples are present: the game maintains *Contra*'s signature blend of frenetic shooting and tricky platforming action, electric guitar permeates all the gunfire, the game is tough as nails, and there are vehicle sections and the two-slot weapon system. You also get an impressive level of control over Bill and Lance replacements Bahamut and Krystal, who have some new dash moves that come in very handy – particularly the air dash – when trying to dodge the many enemies and bullets that the game continually throws at you.

But even with the benefit of a life bar, new evasive manoeuvres and the game being generous in its health pack distribution, *Uprising* is still an incredibly tough game – the first stage alone has three boss battles – but then, like all the best *Contra* games, the more you play the further you find yourself edging with every run, and that's largely their charm.

Arc does at least try to soften the blow of the arduous arcade mode through the excellent Rising mode, which allows you to unlock and replay levels and level up your characters and weapons as you work through the campaign.

With tough bosses, stunning visuals, nods to past *Contra* games and plenty of game to gradually scratch through, *Uprising* certainly has all the hallmarks that fans of the series would want.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 (XBLA)
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PLAYSTATION 3 (PSN)
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** ARC SYSTEM WORKS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Contra* popularised the run-and-gun genre after debuting in arcades in 1987. Introducing many mechanics that have become mainstays in the genre, the series has spawned numerous sequels that have stretched five console generations and counting. *Hard Corps* is seen as a series offshoot, which began with the release of *Contra: Hard Corps* on the Mega Drive. *Uprising* is said to be a prequel to that game.

OPINION

Yes, it's bone-crushingly hard, and yes, some won't like how the main heroes now look like *Guilty Gear* combatants, but there's no denying that *Hard Corps: Uprising* is immensely satisfying. Tremendous fun with a second player, it's no *Contra IV*, but it comes close.

Darran Jones

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Hard Corps: Uprising

>> Two characters can be purchased as DLC. To be honest, we reckon they should have been included in the first place.

>> *Uprising*'s protagonist shares a name with Colonel Bahamut from *Contra: Hard Corps*. They're only connected by name, though.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
DEATHSMILES (360)



In a Nutshell

There's no question that *Uprising* is tough as Superman's dad, but it's incredibly polished and comes loaded with some of the most relentless and satisfying run-and-gun action we've seen in a long time. It's incredibly old-school, but brilliant for it.

>> Scores

Presentation	75%
Graphics	85%
Sound	69%
Playability	89%
Addictivity	89%

Overall 85%

NBA Jam

GIVE BASKETBALL AND FRIENDS THE FINGER

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360, PS3 AND WII » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PUBLISHER:** EA » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



Digitised players, big heads, annoying commentary, insane moves – the salient hallmarks of *NBA Jam*. Midway's 1983 arcade smash reinvented videogame basketball into something more bombastic, ridiculous and accessible.

Following the release of the console update a few months ago, EA has now ported the game across to iOS and done a surprisingly good job in transferring its gameplay to the touch screen.

With the game split into two play modes, *NBA Jam* gives you the choice of either jumping straight into a quick match or playing a campaign that sees you working through all 36 teams in the game. By completing challenges, you also get to unlock new players and privileges that allow you to mess around with aspects of the game.

With the shortest match lasting eight minutes, the campaign will take a while to finish. And although the gameplay does get a bit repetitive, this is certainly a game better in short bursts and thus works great on handhelds.

Two methods of control are on offer. The first is surprisingly solid and uses a combination of a virtual D-pad and three action buttons. The second method, which we struggled to really get on with at all, replaces the buttons with an action wheel that requires you to swipe your thumb across it to perform passes, blocks and slam dunks.

Our only real gripe is the disappointing lack of multiplayer. A baffling omission, it's a real oversight and simply prevents us from regarding this as currently the best sports game on the iPhone.

>> Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	86%
Sound	50%
Playability	80%
Addictivity	75%
Overall	**75%**

iOS



» [iPhone] Fearing the worst, we were actually impressed by the solidness of the controls in this version.





OPINION

I was a big fan of the Wii version that came out several months back, so it's pleasing to see EA cram pretty much all of it into the iPhone. The controls work well and require very little effort to use, while the format makes it ideal for portable play.

Darran Jones

iOS



League Of Evil

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE
» **PRICE:** £1.19 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> Controlling a character that looks like a cross between *Bionic Commando*'s Spencer and *Mortal Kombat*'s Kano, this addictive precision platform game basically finds you negotiating hazard-laden levels in order to locate and punch a scientist to bits in as fast a time as possible. Tricky but compulsively playable, fans of the high-challenge *Mega Man*-style platformers should certainly consider this.

>> Score **79%**

iOS



New Puzzle Bobble

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> Taito introduces some interesting ideas here to the careworn *Puzzle Bobble* formula. These include boss battles, an interesting homage to *Space Invaders*, and a brilliant new firing mechanic that allows you to chip bubbles into the air in order to start bursting from anywhere in the pack. It strikes a good balance in offering a refreshing spin on the popular match-three puzzler.

>> Score **72%**

iOS



Broken Sword II

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPAD
» **PRICE:** £3.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> Few series feel as timeless as *Broken Sword*, and few genres really suit the iPad better than point-and-click adventures. With that in mind, it should come as no surprise that this recent enhanced version of *The Smoking Mirror* is an essential purchase. Remastered features include brand new animated character portraits, an improved score and, of course, touch controls – that's a given, though, really.

>> Score **89%**

iOS



Robokill

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPAD
» **PRICE:** 59P » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> Starting life as a Flash game, this slick top-down twin-stick shooter with subtle RPG elements took us back to our Amiga days. You steer an armoured mech and must traverse rooms of a space station, completing objectives that generally involve blasting droids, finding key cards and then blasting away more droids. Okay, so its gameplay is quite basic, but we did find ourselves really enjoying it in short bursts.

>> Score **70%**



»[Live Arcade] You'll use your hovercraft to access many areas of the game. As you upgrade it you'll gain access to new areas of Hillys.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Beyond Good & Evil HD

>> Other Michel Ancel games include *Rayman, Tonic Trouble* and *Peter Jackson's King Kong*

>> Jade is voiced by Jodie Forrest, who has voiced a number of games including *Rayman Rush*

✱ WHY NOT TRY

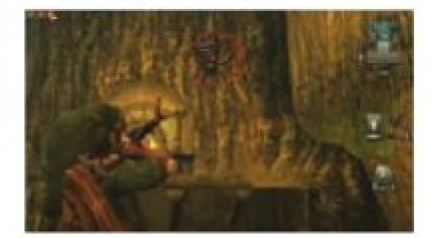
▼ SOMETHING OLD

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK (N64)



▼ SOMETHING NEW

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS (GAMECUBE)



MICHEL ANCEL'S POPULAR ADVENTURE GETS A MAKEOVER

Beyond Good & Evil HD



Ubisoft's *Beyond Good & Evil* has built up quite a reputation in the last eight years. Critically acclaimed by many reviewers at the time of its release, it failed to impress commercially and is now fiercely loved by those who were lucky enough to discover it the first time around.

So, it's nice to see Ubisoft give the game a new airing on Xbox Live Arcade. Yes, you could argue that it's nothing more than a way of testing interest for the incoming release of *Beyond Good & Evil 2*, but considering the game's 'classic' reputation and the bargainous price point that it offers, it would be churlish to accuse Ubisoft of cynicism.

From the game's exciting opening, which sees you defending your island from an incoming attack, *Beyond Good & Evil* quickly establishes itself as a very polished adventure. Yes, it's indebted heavily to Nintendo's *Zelda* franchise, but copying from the best is no bad thing if you have your own style. And style is one thing Michel Ancel's game has in abundance.

From its beautifully crafted characters, to the strange fauna that you have to photograph in order to earn money, *Beyond Good & Evil* still feels immensely refreshing. Yes, there are annoying niggles that could have all been corrected for this update – disorientating maps, occasionally confusing objectives and a sometimes maddeningly erratic camera – but there's no escaping the enjoyment that comes from discovering every last corner of Hillys, accompanied by one of the best dramatic musical scores ever recorded for a videogame.

One of the biggest strengths of Ancel's game, however, is just how well the characters themselves stand up. Protagonist Jade remains one of the strongest female gaming creations since Lara Croft, while the interplay between herself and companions such as Pey'j and Double H easily makes up for *Beyond Good & Evil*'s often linear (but nonetheless enjoyable) gameplay.

While we'd never put *Beyond & Good Evil* on the same high pedestal as the *Zelda* games it so flawlessly mimics, it's rather gratifying to see it released for a brand new audience. Here's hoping people now realise what a great game it is, and we finally get to see the sequel.

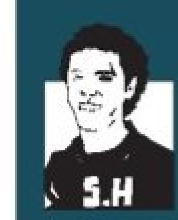
INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80)
- » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT SHANGHAI
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Beyond Good & Evil* was first released in 2003 for the PS2 and later GameCube, Xbox and PC. The brainchild of *Rayman* creator Michel Ancel, it immediately earned acclaim thanks to its distinct style and strong leading lady. Despite not being a commercial success, a sequel is now planned for later this year.

OPINION



It's certainly no *Zelda*, but *Beyond Good & Evil* is a very, very good game. Charming characters, an interesting world and a clever blend of play mechanics combine to create an absorbing adventure. It might be a little hollow for some, but its sheer charm pulls you through.

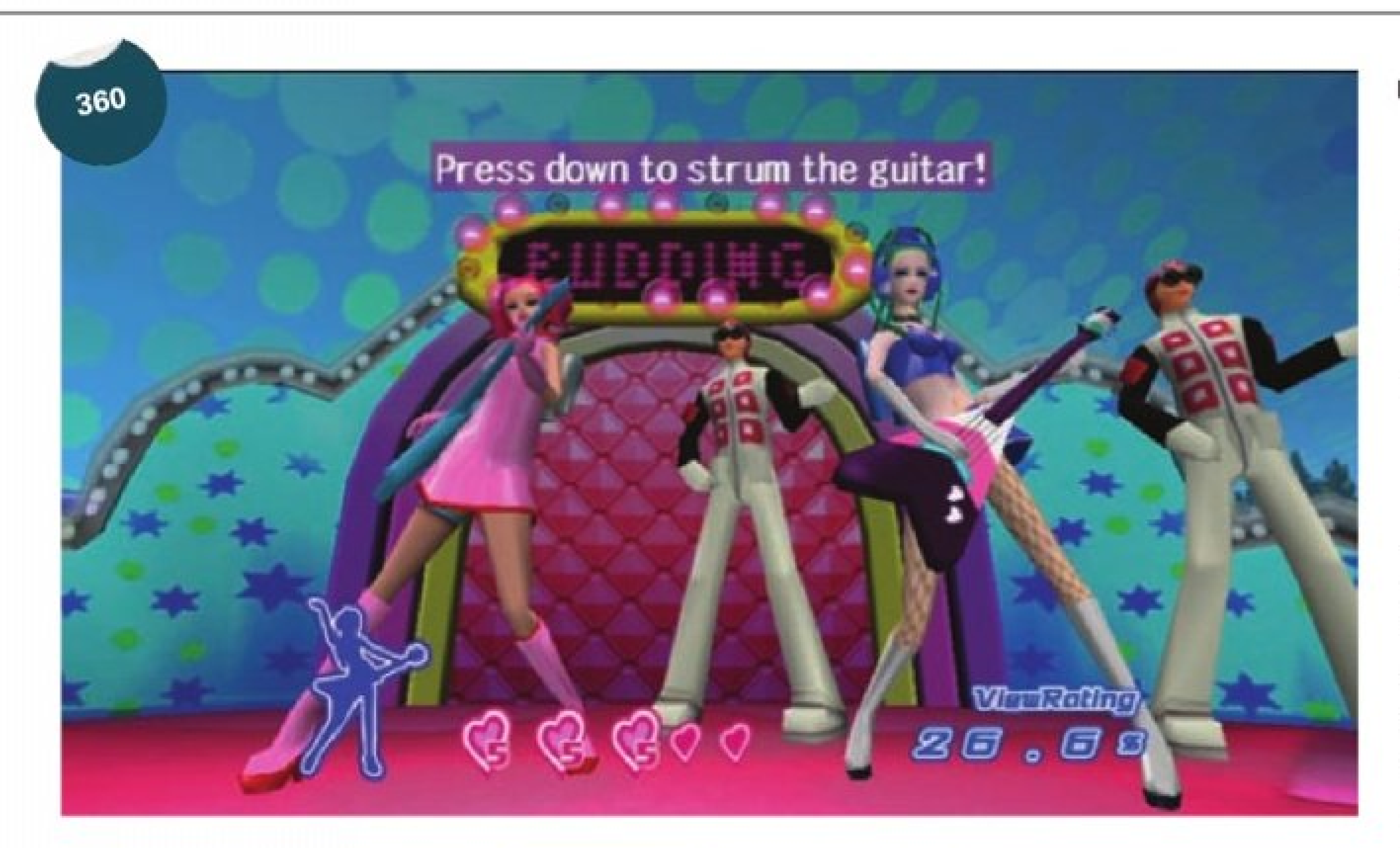
Stuart Hunt

In a Nutshell

It's not perfect and could have been improved for this update, but *Beyond Good & Evil* still ranks as one of the best *Zelda* clones ever made. At this price, it would be a crime to miss it.

>> Scores

Presentation	**82%**
Graphics	**88%**
Sound	**93%**
Playability	**88%**
Addictivity	**87%**
Overall	**88%**





» [Xbox 360] Why couldn't Sega just make an entire game made up of these bits?

OPINION

After the majesty of *Mega Drive Collection,* this new Dreamcast offering feels like a real slap in the face to Sega fans. There's no denying that two of the featured games remain of a high quality, but the slapdash and cynical way in which this has been thrown together is disappointing.

Darran Jones

The Dreamcast Collection

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



If you forget that four games were clearly drawn together by a mutual connection to XBLA, this collection is a bizarre quartet of titles to pack together. You get *Sonic Adventure*, with its excellent 3D Sonic action sections trapped inside loading screens and a cheesy CG cartoon, *Sega Bass Fishing*, which loses a lot of charm without the plastic fishing rod controller, the excellent *Space Channel 5 Part 2*, and *Crazy Taxi*, which – I don't care what anyone says – is still *Crazy Taxi* without licensing. I might be in the minority, but what I used to love most about *Crazy Taxi* wasn't listening to 'Way Down The Line' while absorbing adverts.

That Sega has seen fit to burn this predictable roster of XBLA games onto a disc isn't the most disappointing aspect of this collection, though – it's that zero love and care has been put into making it anything for fans to get excited about except online leaderboards – no behind-the-scenes interviews, bonus games, or even manual scans. Those hoping for the DC equivalent of *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection* will be disappointed.

If you are considering this pack because you cannot wait to play *Sega Bass Fishing* with an Xbox controller then snap this up – you probably deserve each other – and if it's *Space Channel* you're hankering for then our advice would be to wait to see if the game materialises on XBLA. By that time of course, this collection will likely have dropped in price anyway.

>> Scores

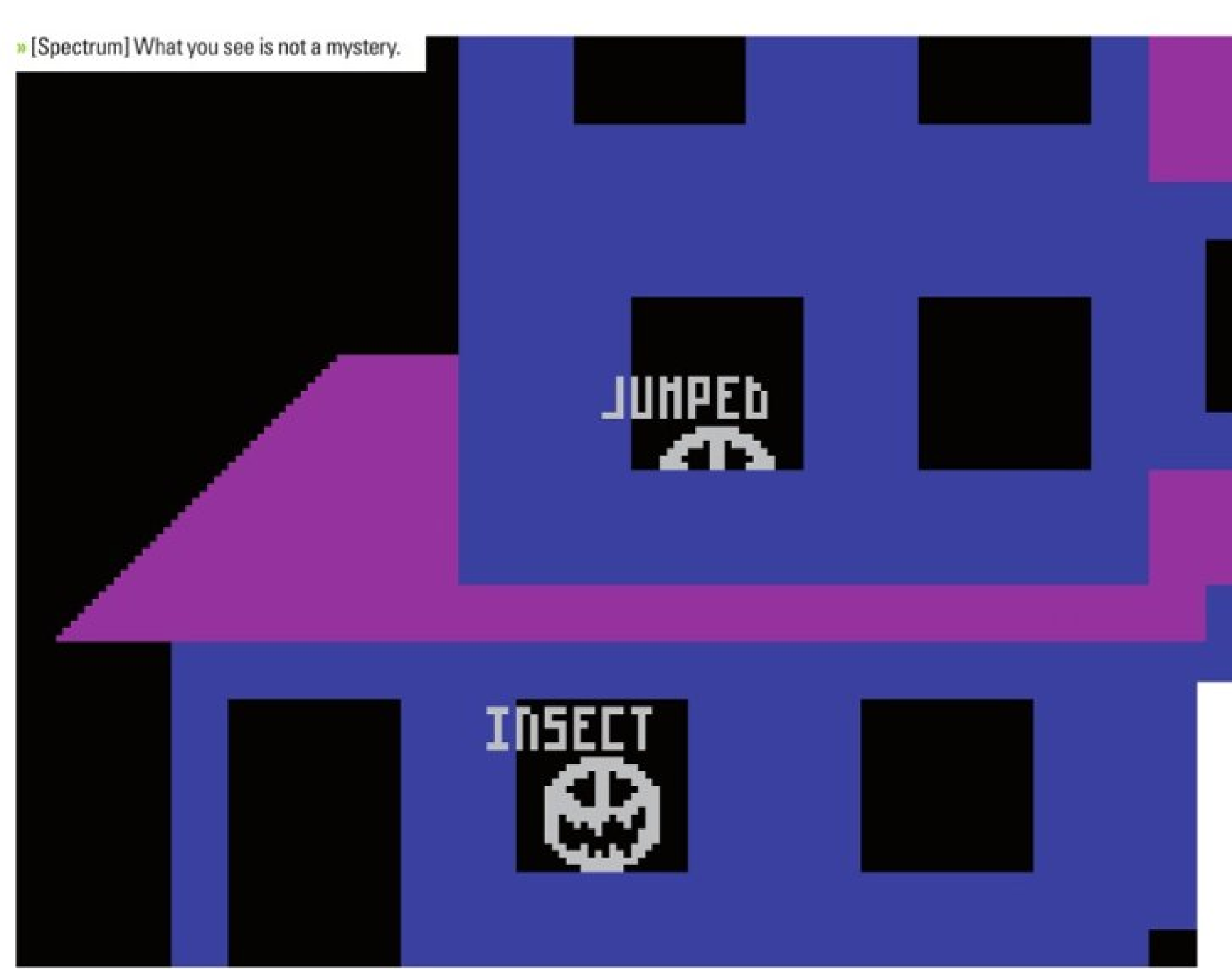
Presentation	10%
Graphics	70%
Sound	65%
Playability	70%
Addictivity	70%

Overall 56%

HOMEBREW



Another year begins and the annual mini-game competition has started… sort of. After the poor voting turnout last year that saw the 4K category not receiving a single ballot, the organiser is wondering what he can do to improve things. I'm sure some of the people who read these introductions can help with ideas or advice – http://kikstart.eu/minigame-2011



» [Spectrum] What you see is not a mystery.



» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM
» **DEVELOPED BY:** JONATHAN CAULDWELL
» **LINK:** HTTP://KIKSTART.EU/TRIPE
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2011
» **PRICE:** FREE (CASSETTE TBA)

UTTER TRIPE

WHERE DOES HE GET THESE NAMES FROM?!

Around six months ago, Jonathan Cauldwell posted a couple of hints to forums about his next project; not an unusual event, of course, but when he described it as "a series of action games with no controls", mentioned that the name was going to be *Utter Tripe* and commented on how many more mini-games it would feature than his previous multi-game title *GameX*, people were left wondering what on Earth he was going to come up with.

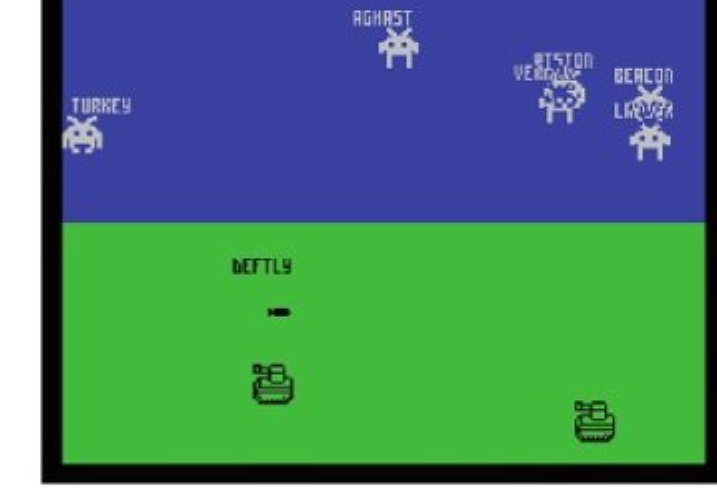
Well, now we know and, ignoring the bizarre scenario involving challenges, tripe wizards and an ordeal by cobblers, the easiest way to describe *Utter Tripe* would be similar to the result of *Wario Ware* and *Typing Of The Dead* breeding together in captivity – in other words, it's a series of diverse typing-based mini-games. The player starts with three lives, and one is lost each time a game isn't completed successfully. Occasionally, a letter will meander past accompanied by a word to be entered; collecting the entire word BONUS in this way means that the next game is a screen containing nine items concealing extras like double scoring or an extra life.

Each game is designed to be a 'quick hit', usually only lasting around thirty to forty seconds with the next being selected randomly and, although the general theme is entering words within a time limit, the content is varied. There are sports-related events such as Footy or Clay Pigeon, where words are typed to take penalties or fire a shotgun, more abstract tasks like answering telephones in Hotline, selecting ingredients for a Smoothie and bursting or manoeuvring balloons with fans in Party Balloons and Fan Club respectively. Jonathan has also created variations of coin-op classics *Tapper* and *Centipede* as well as a pastiche of his own *Homebrew* where airborne fruit must be dropped into a demi john. As things progress, the length of the words grow to increase the difficulty level, and a tally of typing accuracy is kept along with the overall score.

The in-game graphics are up to the standard we've come to expect from Jonathan Cauldwell – some of them will probably be familiar from his previous games – and for owners of AY-equipped Spectrums there is a good title tune by Yerzmyey, while the in-game sound effects are handled by the beeper. Memory was presumably getting tight at some point though, because the presentation is sparse and only offers single colour title and intermission text screens.

And it should probably be noted that there are a few problems as well; ignoring the potential issues of playing the harder stages using a rubber-keyed Spectrum, the font used to display words is small and can sometimes be difficult to make out clearly when in motion, and there are hiccups that see two objects overlapping and obscuring each other's word entirely, making failure inevitable. Hopefully the promised Cronosoft remix will fix these issues, because *Utter Tripe* is an otherwise very enjoyable if occasionally bizarre game – typing words really shouldn't be this much fun!

91%







» [Spectrum] A hot cup of… vermin?

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

BOULDER LOGIC

» **FORMAT:** ZX81 » **DEVELOPER:** BOB SMITH
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BOULDER-81 » **PRICE:** FREE

Bradford Walker-Smythe is close to proposing to his true love Tanya, but he needs a ring. Rather than wander into his friendly high street jeweller he instead heads west to Cornwall, where he happens upon an abandoned mine which, rather than offering a seam of clotted cream and scones, is full of precious gems. Of course, Bradford is going to have to grab loads in order to find that perfect stone for his beloved.

Boulder Logic is Bob Smith's attempt at cramming the challenge of Atari 8-bit classic *Boulder Dash* into 16K of ZX81, and it is admirable; the chunky boulders can be dropped on enemies, amoebas multiply until there's no more space before metamorphosing into diamonds, keys can be found to unlock doors and there's glinting diamonds to be collected everywhere.

Difficulty has been pitched well too, challenging players from the start and letting them discover the means to get through each stage without being too intent on trapping or killing poor Rock… erm, Bradford.

90%

» [ZX81] Making a dash for it.









» [C64] Spiderbot, spiderbot – does whatever a spiderbot can.

SPACE TRIP

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** ACHIM VOLKERS
» **DOWNLOAD:** IKIKSTART.EU/SPACE-TRIP » **PRICE:** FREE

The robots aboard a fleet of super dreadnoughts have gone haywire and space trouble shooter Steve Zappa has been employed to go in and clean house. Weapons can be found aboard each of the stricken vessels along with energy dispensers to charge them up… and hordes of lethal robots waiting to rip through Steve's heath bar, so the conveniently abandoned medicine packs are handy too. Computer terminals scattered around the dreadnoughts give a running inventory and, when one has been cleared of marauding mechanisms, will let Steve teleport back to his shuttle craft.

Although the simple bas-relief graphics and in-game sounds of *Space Trip* are underwhelming, the game itself is a fun, sedately paced platform shooter; there's no time limit to worry about, so Captain Zappa can play a waiting game, camping out and popping up to launch an occasional shot robot-wards. Additionally, there's some tension to be had when the health bar is nearly depleted and several trigger happy robots are sat between player and a medicine pack.

83%

UWOL 2

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** THE MOJON TWINS » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/UWOL2-CPC » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Amstrad CPC] Whoops, missed an important key.

Poor Uwol's quest for wonga isn't going well. Finally escaping the treasure rooms of the Storm Palace, he bumps into a phantom and is sent tumbling into the Electric Garden, losing all his scavenged booty during the fall. Now he's faced with a choice: should he just try to survive the garden and get to safety or take the risk of ducking into the familiar-looking pipes along the way that take him down into underground chambers that are littered with cash?

Despite the slightly drab but reasonable graphics and a good soundtrack, this does come as a disappointment after the first *Uwol*. The Mojon Twins have tried to build on their original, but that expansion is to the detriment of the game speed and, when combined with his inertial movement, this makes *Uwol* sluggish to control. Had the original tempo been maintained, this could have been a more respectable successor.

62%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Amstrad CPC] Getting that sinking feeling.

>> We All Live In A…

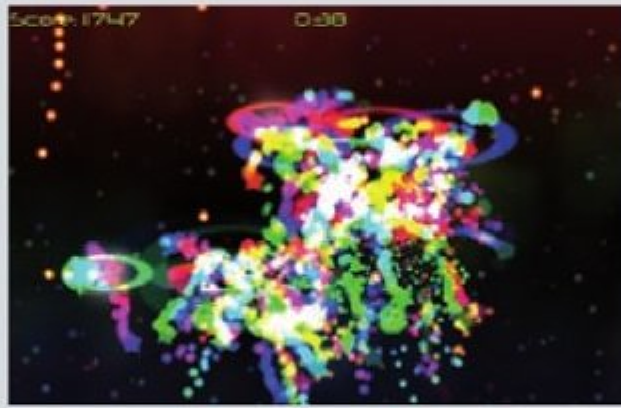
Amstrad CPC shoot-'em-up genius Paul Kooistra has recently finished a conversion of Psytronik's *Sub Hunter*, originally developed by Richard Bayliss and Frank Gasking. The original was well received when released just over a year ago so it promises to be an exciting marriage; we'll have a play before next issue to see if it lives up to our expectations. For more info: http://kikstart.eu/subhunter-cpc



» [Amstrad CPC] R-Type – the extended remix.

>> Just Our Type

And while we're on the subject of CPC shoot-'em-ups, an ambitious project is afoot; many CPC fans felt cheated over their conversion of *R-Type* being a rushed port of the Spectrum version, so a small group working under the name Easter Egg have banded together with the intention of producing a better conversion. The preview video at http://kikstart.eu/rtype-cpc looks the part, so this is one to watch.



» [PC] *SYNSO*-inspired psychedelics.

>> All The Pretty Colours

Since we're fans of *SYNSO 2: Squid Harder*, *Neon Lights* caught our collective eye; developer Niall Moody says it's inspired by Rob Fearon's fishy blaster. *Neon Lights* offers score and time attack options and a survival mode, as well as what Niall describes as "a Tony Hart-inspired draw mode". Up to four people can play either cooperatively or competitively on one PC. Go to http://kikstart.eu/neon-lights

HOMEBREW

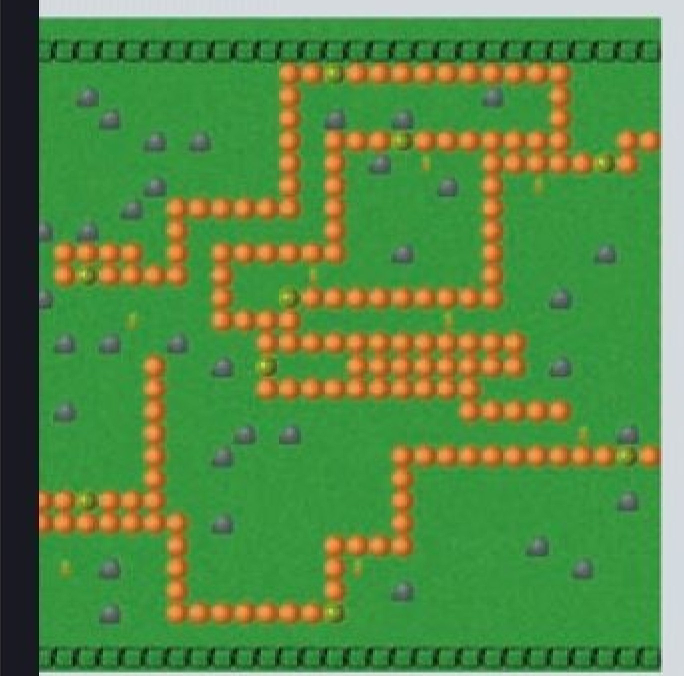
>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'SBREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> You Know Where To Come

While the Comet64 internet modem has been around long enough that C64 emulator VICE supports it, there hasn't been a game released that specifically utilised its online gaming abilities. That was until the beta version of *Group Zork* arrived recently – and yes, it really is a re-working of Infocom's early text adventure with full internet support and multiple players. http://kikstart.eu/group-zork should provide further information about how to get online and start interacting.



» [PC] Three down, forty seven to go!

>> Cassette 50 – The Revenge

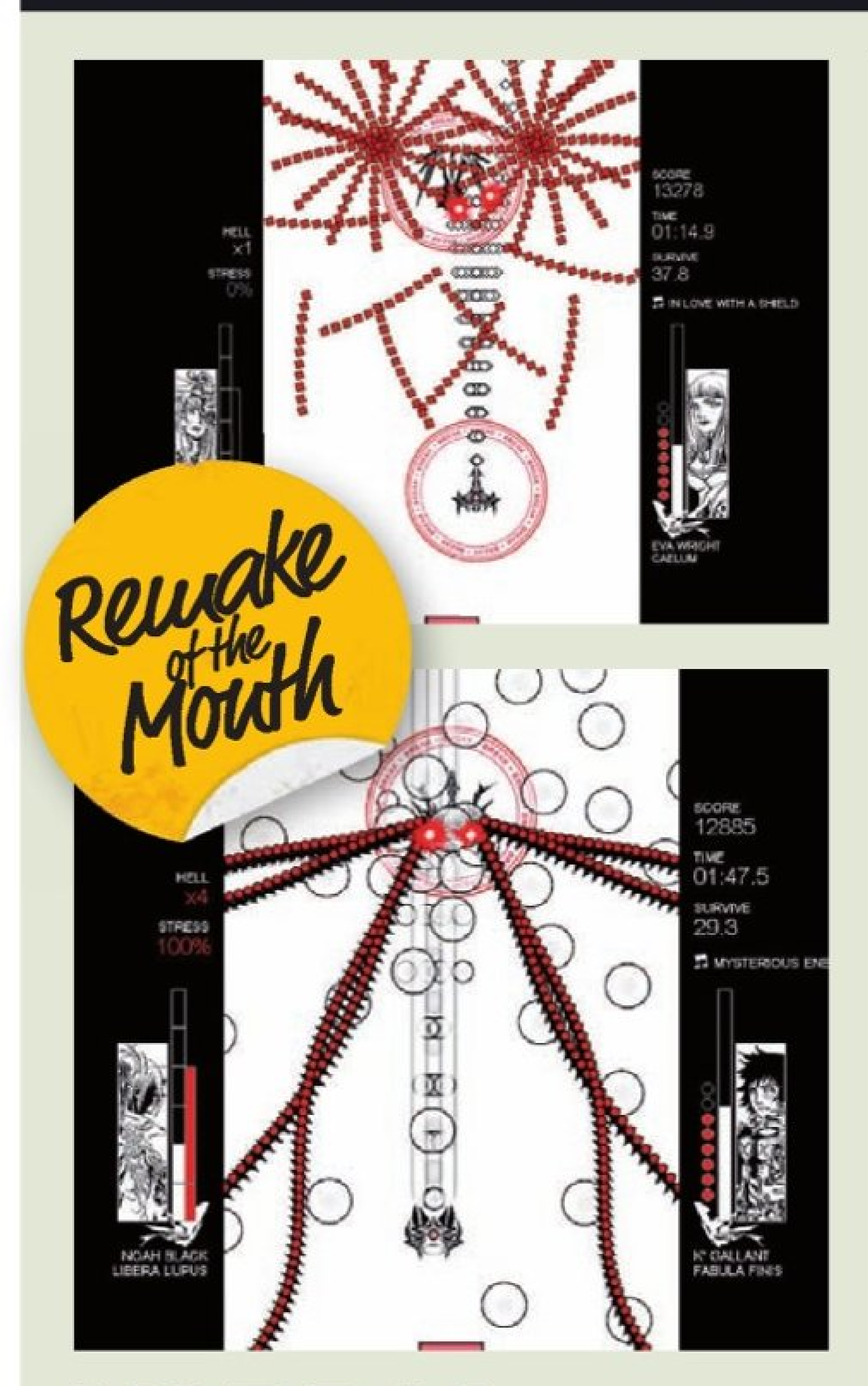
Over at AGameAWeek.com, Jayenkai has been seduced by the "charms" of Cascade's "classic" *Cassette 50* – so much so that he's using several titles from the CPC version of that slightly dubious font of ideas as the basis for games. So far he's churned out *Royal Rescue, Evasive Action* and *Inferno*, each of which is a bit more playable than the original and available for either Windows PC or Intel Mac.



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Cat Astro Phi.**

JONESY THE CAT keeps getting flung out into space by a dodgy ejector seat and his owner must rescue him from alien-infested bases. That means collecting key cards to open doors, guns to shoot aliens, fuel cells for the ship and finally the cat itself to escape each world. http://kikstart.eu/cat-astro

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



VORPAL



» **DOWNLOAD:** HTTP://KIKSTART.EU/VORPAL

The blueprints for a powerful new weapon, the Vorpal Blade, have been stolen after their creator was murdered. Now six playable combatants all want to get their hands on it, some with darker uses for its vast powers in mind than others. These challengers each have a ship built to a unique specification – some heavily armed but slow moving and others nippier but less tooled up in the blasting department – and for each contender the trail to the plans will see them facing the other five head-to-head as they unleash a series of attacks.

Minimal character exposition aside, *Vorpal* is a bullet hell shooter, so enemies throw out more ammunition per minute than a Eighties action movie and the player's hit box – the area of their craft that registers a collision – is miniscule. Along with the conventional move and shoot controls, the ships can all be slowed down with a shoulder button to make dodging bullets a bit easier, and there's a 'break' weapon for emergencies. It is charged by repeatedly shooting an opponent, converting all enemy bullets on-screen into collectible items, and beefing up the firepower when triggered until its gauge is depleted. Along with the variety offered by those six craft, there are also normal and hard difficulty levels to choose from that should sort the men from the boys.

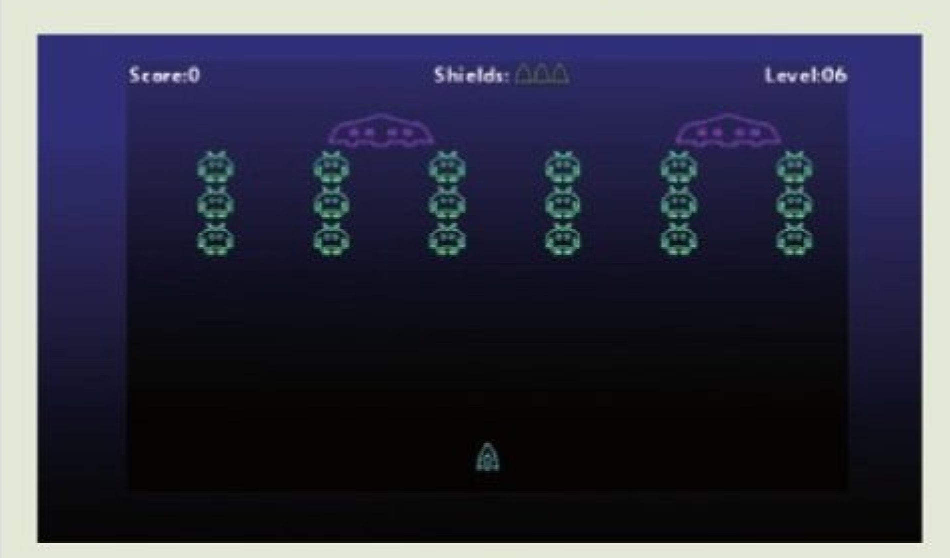


ABAN HAWKINS AND THE 1,000 SPIKES

» **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE INDIE GAMES

Calling *Aban Hawkins* *and the 1,000 Spikes* difficult is like declaring a hurricane to be 'just a tad windy'. An obvious influence is the *Rick Dangerous* series, and features everything that was frustrating about those games. It could be part of a campaign to sell more Xbox 360 controllers by getting players to wreck them.

Each stage has to be learnt step by painstaking step, committing to memory which of the visually identical blocks will collapse or explode, where the spikes spring up, which arrow launchers are armed… so unless you're a true gaming masochist with 80 points spare, save your sanity by downloading *Rocky Memphis* instead.



ALIEN SUPER MEGA BLASTER



» **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE INDIE GAMES

Alien Super Mega Blaster is a harrowing morality tale about… no, just kidding. It's yet another indie shoot-'em-up with a kink in the design; each class of enemy explodes differently and the debris from a downed nasty is fatal to both player and enemy craft. The player is only issued with one life, but does get shields to use in emergencies, more of which are awarded during the hundred levels.

Although it can't hold a candle visually to the other XBLIG shooters, there's an serviceable and almost strategic shoot-'em-up in there that, despite the slower pace, still requires quick reactions from time to time. The price tag is 80 points, with the proceeds being donated to muscular dystrophy charity Action Duchenne.



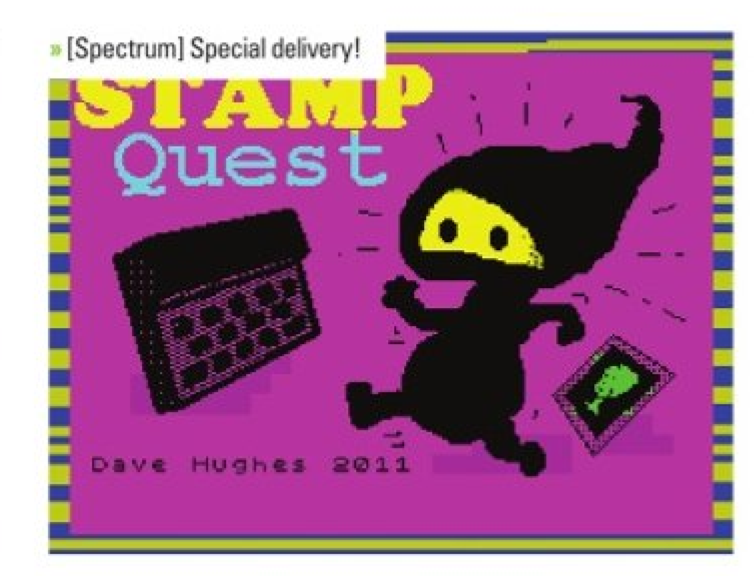
HOMEBREW HEROES

DAVE HUGHES IS A NEWLY-MINTED SPECTRUM PROGRAMMER WHOSE FIRST GAME WAS THE QUIRKY PLATFORMER STAMP QUEST WE LOOKED AT LAST ISSUE; WE ONLY HAD TO BRIBE HIM WITH TEA AND CAKE TO GET AN INTERVIEW...



» [Spectrum] Putting his stamp on Spectrum gaming.

» [Spectrum] Special delivery!





Retro Gamer: What got you into programming homebrew?
Dave Hughes: Milk and no sugar, ta. Ooh, is that Battenburg? I'll have the end piece. I was interested since I started gaming on the 48K+ Spectrum. My attempts at programming were hopeless and I never seemed to improve, so I lost interest and forgot all about it for 15 years. Then a few years ago I saw *Micro Men* on BBC4 and it rekindled my interest. I think the spectrum graphics had a lot to do with it. I found myself looking at retro computer sites and began to learn machine code. It was much easier second time round, thanks to great resources like the World of Spectrum.



» [Spectrum] A very early preview of Dave's next project!

RG: And what attracted you to the Spectrum specifically?
DH: The spectrum is unique. Spectrum games look so distinctive compared to any other machine, retro or otherwise. Its display and attribute quirks (some might say limitations) mean that things have to look a bit different, so you'd better make the most of it, and if a programmer is able to make an arcade adaptation look alright we all know they must have really tried. It's much more than simply 'the best of a bad job', though; I really love the Spectrum for the bright colours, as well as its resolution and programming control.

RG: Where did the initial idea come from for *Stamp Quest*?
DH: Well, everyone likes stamps, don't they? I've always loved platform games and wanted to do my own, and after all this time it's so difficult to do something totally new, so why not just do my own take on a classic idea? The game design was mostly led by my programming limitations, so at the time, when I realised I could move a little man left, right, up and down I grew it from there. My coded jumps looked so poor that I missed them out entirely and introduced the teleporters! I'm a cartoonist and writer too, so I was able to bring some nice graphics and humour to the rest of the game.

HIGH FIVE

The classic games that Davecan't live without

1. **Albatrossity (Spectrum)** Anyone who can make a golf game interesting is a genius.
2. **Sid Spanners 2 (Spectrum)** Simple single-screen platform games are my favourite kind of game.
3. **Zombie Calavera (Spectrum)** A real masterclass in playing to the Spectrum's strengths.
4. **Crimbo (Spectrum)** Addictive and cute. What's not to like?
5. **Genesis: Dawn of a New day (Spectrum)** An above-average sideways scroller.

RG: What have you found to be the most enjoyable and difficult parts of developing a game?
DH: The most enjoyable: seeing it work, getting around the obstacles, looking up and realising how late it is but not caring, playing it, completing it, seeing other people enjoy it. Best feeling in the world (well, second or third). The most difficult: Why's it crashed? Why's the RAM filled with junk every left turn? Why won't the sprite move? Why don't the collisions work? Why am I so hopeless and thick? Why can I make this damn thing work?! Why?! Why?!! WHY?!!

RG: And can you tell us about what you're working on at the moment?
DH: It's early in development but the next one will have proper smooth sprites instead of being character-based (that's probably not very groundbreaking for most but it is for me!). I've got a few ideas that I hope will coalesce into something interesting soon. The current plan is to have a mix of arcade and puzzle… and moths, loads of moths!

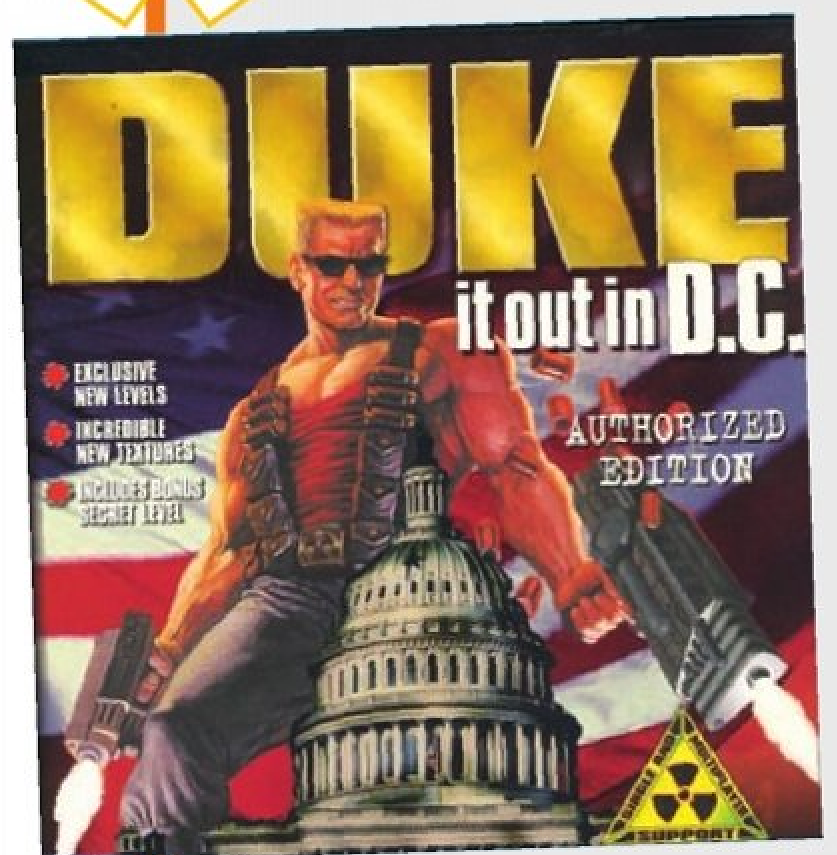
RG: Who would you say are your programming heroes?
DH: Mathew Smith first. I love the vision, skill and humour that he put into *Manic Miner*. I'm still amazed that someone could code something so groundbreaking so young. I think Jonathan Cauldwell is great for his passion, intellect, inspiration and willingness to share his knowledge. I'm impressed by any coder who gives a little bit of themselves.

RG: Finally, what advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?
DH: Don't be afraid of it being crap!

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER



» We were racking our brains trying to think of the most American-looking image to put here. This was it.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Dear Retro Gamer,

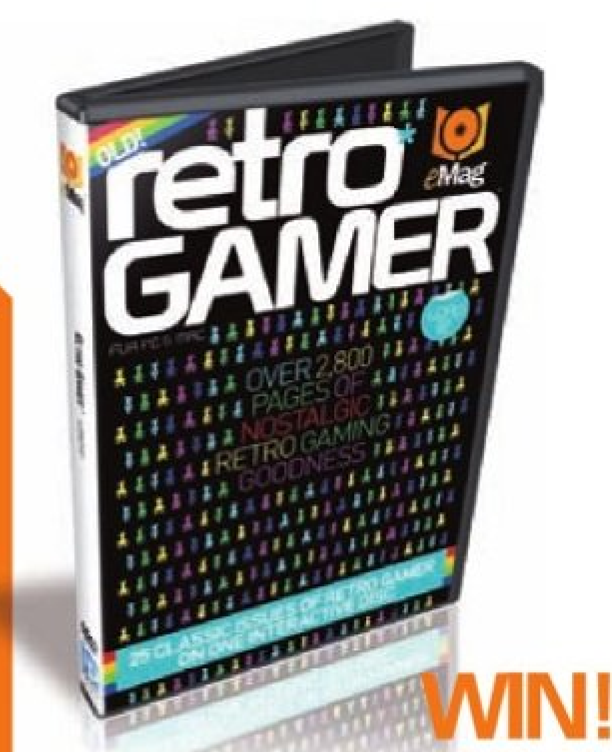
First, I need to thank you again for such a great magazine. I sent a recent issue to my brother, who is currently stationed in Afghanistan, and he reported back that everyone that picked up the magazine was shocked that such a publication existed and that it was put together so well. These guys are constantly being put into very stressful and extremely dangerous situations, so it really made me feel good to know that **Retro Gamer** was providing some kind of escape for them. I do have a subscription but unfortunately the local Barnes & Noble didn't have the most recent issue to send.

Secondly, you guys need to somehow let everyone here in the US know that your magazine exists! Every time I visit a bookstore selling your magazine, I make sure to bring it front and centre – it's always hidden behind some pointless 'tips and tricks' type gaming magazine. I think people over here would go crazy for your **Retro Gamer Collection** books, but so many people don't seem to be aware of it.

Oh, and thanks for putting out volume two of the hardware guide. I made sure to pick it up and have loved every page. While I'm at it, I love the retro mugs too! Again, thanks for the hard work and for putting out such a quality magazine. You guys really are the best.

Will, Washington, IL, USA

It's great to hear that your brother is enjoying the magazine and it's good to know that it's helping him get through a difficult time. If you forward us on his address we'll happily send him Volume 2 of our eMag. That should improve his spirits tenfold!



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

ELF HAS SHOT THE REVIEW

Dear Retro Gamer

What on earth happened to *Gauntlet* for the DS? I read your review years ago now and it looked like it was going to be a must-have game for *Gauntlet* fans everywhere. The release date was constantly pushed back and after a while I got tired of waiting and decided to get in touch with the developers. The response I had wasn't good and suggested that the game was definitely cancelled and no longer coming out. Why did you bother reviewing this game if no one was ever going to be able to play it?

David Jenkins

We feel your pain, David, but sometimes things just aren't meant to be. We really enjoyed *Gauntlet* on the DS, as it was a welcome throwback to the original arcade games with a few mechanics from the later titles thrown in for good measure. The game was certainly complete when we reviewed it and a lot of fun as well, so it does seem bizarre that Eidos Interactive, the publisher at the time, didn't decide to release it. When we reviewed it there was every indication that it was coming out the following month. If we'd known differently at the time we certainly wouldn't have reviewed it.



» [DS] *Gauntlet*. We played it, liked it and scored it 81%. Then, sadly, it disappeared from this world. Had we had a crystal ball we wouldn't have bothered.

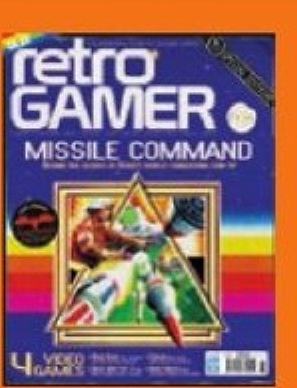
CHANNEL CROSSING

Dear Retro Gamer,

I am a French reader of **RG** and enjoy every issue of your magazine. I'd also like to give a big thumbs-up to your subs department since I have every issue in my mailbox only a few days after its release. However, I do find that from my foreign point of view, the magazine is a little too UK-centric when it comes to European games.

Clearly, there are a lot of great developers in the UK that had and still have a key role in the videogames industry, but some other countries in Europe also deserve focus

For example, we have in France quite a few game designers that could be covered in your magazine. Frédérick Raynal (*Alone In The Dark*, *Little Big Adventure*), Éric Chahi (*Another World*) or Michel Ancel (*Rayman*) would all make for great interviews, while companies such as Delphine Software or Lankhor (*Mortville Manor*, *Vroom*) were



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



» YOUTUBE UPDATE

EXCITEMENT HAS BEEN mounting for the release of Nintendo's new 3D console. Magazine delays mean that there are no reviews in this current issue, but you can expect coverage on *Pilotwings Resort, Super Street Fighter IV, Ridge Racer 3D* and more next month. We're very excited.
www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz

known and are remembered all across Europe for their great games.

Here's hoping you get more European coverage in later issues of the magazine.
Philippe

Thanks for the letter, Philippe, and we do understand your concerns. It's important to remember, though, that we are based in the UK, so that is where most of our interest will be. Then there's the language barrier to consider as well. Then, of course, there's the fact that some people just don't want to speak to us – we've been asking for Michel Ancel interviews since issue 19! We are aware of our European audience, though, and will do what we can to include more continental coverage in the future.

CAVE STORY

Dear Retro Gamer

When will you get around to featuring an interview about Cave? They've been incredibly important to the success of the shoot-'em-up – something I know you're big fans of – so it seems strange that you haven't interviewed one of the few developers to still wave the flag for one of gaming's greatest genres. I know from occasionally visiting the forum that Darran now has a Japanese 360 and that *Deathsmiles* will be out in the UK very soon, so I think there's never been a better time for **Retro Gamer** to start covering one of my favourite developers.
Henry Moore

We've been trying to get an interview with Cave for a very long time now, but the language barrier always stopped us. Fortunately, this has now been rectified, and after a lot of hard work we have managed to secure a great interview that delves into the company's background, future, and also explains how it creates its world-renowned shooters. Your wish is granted on page 68.

COVER MY HAND

Dear Retro Gamer,

While I adore your magazine, I must admit that I am a bit put out by the general lack of handheld coverage in each issue of the magazine. Machines like the Game Boy, Game Gear and even the WonderSwan have all found their ways into my collection over the years and I loved each and every one of them. To some of my friends at school they received more focus than their home systems due to their portability, so I find it a real shame that they don't have more prominence within the magazine. I'd love to see features on the birth of the Atari Lynx, how the Game Boy conquered the world, and the many great arcade conversions on the Game Gear, and I'm sure many other readers would like to see them as well. Please make it happen.
James Mason

You're right, James. We don't cover handhelds anywhere near as often as we should. We have, of course, covered all three machines you mention in various retrospectives, and the odd classic game does pop up here or there, but more can and will be done. There's a big making of *Resident Evil Gaiden* in the very next issue, and Darran's been sitting on a huge

"Here's hoping you get more European coverage in later issues of the mag"

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Peter Maris
Joined:	20 January 2011
Location:	Not given
Occupation:	Journalist
Website:	www.nesisme.tk
Fave Games System:	NES



» *Resident Evil Gaiden* is the black sheep of the *Resident Evil* franchise and just one of our upcoming handheld features.



BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 42,600



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: ASTEROIDS

Why I picked it: It's a clever shooter that I've always wanted to excel at.

Handy tip: Try not to continually move around unless you have to and only rely on the hyperjump when it's absolutely necessary.



High Score: 74,900

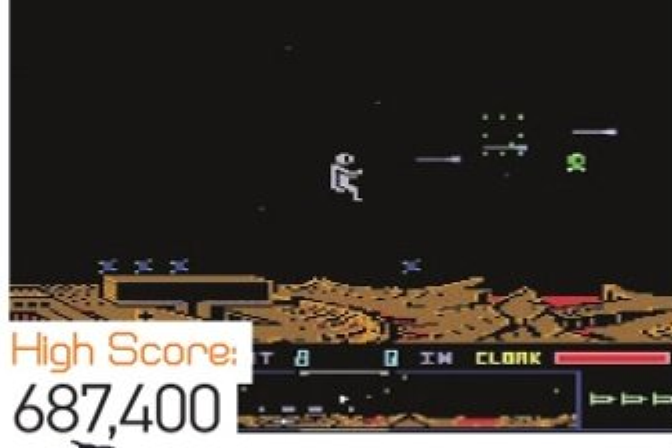


STUART

CHOSEN GAME: IRON HORSE

Why I picked it: Darran played *Express Raider* and it reminded me of this uber-frustrating Western run-and-gunner.

Handy tip: Use the level obstructions to coerce enemies into your fists, bullwhip or pistol.



High Score: 687,400



ANDREW

CHOSEN GAME: DROPZONE

Why I picked it: I still have an irrational preference for the C64 version, because I played it first.

Handy tip: Use the cloak to help finish off the last few enemies.

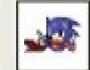
From the forum

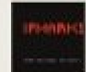
» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite arcade clone?

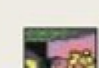

jdanddiaet
Of course there were loads on the Speccy, but my first love was a *Scramble* clone called *Penetrator* by Melbourne House. It also had a cool level editor!

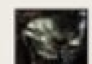

RetroBob
Does *Action Fighter* on the Master System count? Seems similar to *Spy Hunter*, has a great sense of speed and the music is ace too.


ipmarks
My absolute favourite unofficial arcade clone was *Starstrike 3D* on the ZX Spectrum. With no official port of *Star Wars* – I think there was eventually, much later in the Spectrum's life – this program was a godsend. Top class graphics, great gameplay, and pretty much arcade perfect. I played it so much I think it gave me RSI. Mention must also go to *Horace Goes Skiing* for a great *Frogger* clone. But not to *Kong* by Ocean – that could just be one of the worst unofficial clones ever.


djcarlos
Arcadians on the Electron, mainly because it was the first game I ever played on my very first computer.


stvd
Bear Bovver (ZX Spectrum), a loose clone of *Burger Time*. I say 'loose' as the programmer at least changed the graphics rather than going for an all-out rip-off!

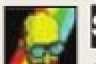

Mayhem
Toss up between two really, both on Commodore machines. *Gridrunner* by Jeff Minter for making *Centipede* more exciting, or *Toy Bizarre* by Mark Turmell for making the concept of *Mario Bros* actually fun and balanced.

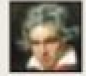

thevulture
Mr Ee! on the BBC of all places. Blatant *Mr Do!* clone and therefore utterly amazing.


bsg
Hmm, I think I would have to go with *Minestorm* on the Vectrex. I loved *Asteroids* in the arcade and this version was the closest thing anybody could get bar owning a real cab. I still get a tingle in my tackle when I turn the beast on.

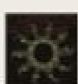

ncf1
Taxman on the Apple II, which I thought was way better than the other *Pac-Man* clones at the time and even more fun than the original ports

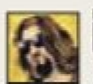

Antiriad2097
My first love was *Mushroom Mania*, one of the better 8-bit *Centipede* clones, but it's roundly beaten by *Defence Force*, the Oric's very own slick version of *Defender*.


SirClive
Galaxians on the C16. Obviously an unlicensed *Galaxian*, but it is the game that made me a gamer. Just watching a mate play it changed my life.

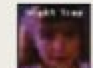

Havantgottaclue
Tony Crowther showed early indications of his talent with his 1983 game *Bug Blaster*, a *Centipede* clone with a generous splash of colour by Commodore 64 standards.

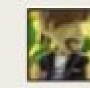
I also had a fair amount of fun with a rudimentary *Defender* clone called *Annihilator 2*, although it is widely thought to have been a steaming pile of horse dung. I would add, however, that the version that's 'going around' (cough) seems to have screwed up collision detection and sprites randomly becoming expanded – obviously a bad dump as these problems weren't in the original, though that doesn't mean it wasn't filth.


quantum
I would say *Mr Ee!* as it gave us a use for the school's BBC machines.


TheDude18
Pac-Mania on the Commodore 16 – a confusingly titled version of *Pac-Man*. It's a great little conversion of the original that is very fast and in which the mazes also have three teleportation pads, which transport you randomly to another part of the maze.

neuromancer
I haven't got my name in the magazine for months, so here's bid for fame and fortune with an extremely old-school ploy: I loved the *Pac-Man* clone *Gulpman* on the ZX-81, which does the old machine proud and kits you out with lasers to dish out much-deserved payback. There was also an *Asteroids* clone which wasn't so hot and used the interesting tactic of displaying your ship simply as the numbers 1-9, depending on which direction you were facing.


learnedrobb
Another shout for *Galaxians* on the C16 here. I only had two games for ages when I had my C16 – one was a BMX game, the other was this. It made everything my best mate had on his 2600 look pants.


themightymartin
Mr Wimpy on the Spectrum, for the sheer audacity of it. It's a clone of *Burger Time*, except for the first level, which rips off *Frogger*.


slacey1070
Kong on the VIC-20 by Anirog – it was as ugly as sin, but boy did I love it! Multi-colours against a white background, but at the time it felt like I was playing the arcade game.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

MEGA DRIVE BOXES

GigaPepsiMan Is it all right to cut the hangers off? I know people like to have the game in perfect nick but these things get in the way and prevent me from storing the games easily.

thesubcon3 I have been debating the same thing. A few of my games already do not have them, but I have dealt with the rest. It's a pain in the arse to deal with them when stacking side by side on my case.

Callis I cut all mine off as a kid as I had to stack games on games sideways and they got in the way. Not done it on any of my current games, though. I can't imagine it having an effect on price.

ShadowNeku The walls in my house are lined with coat hangers displaying my Mega Drive carts. I cry when people amputate their precious hanging tabs.

ELITE 4

IronMaidenRule Just spotted a link for this on Play.com. Have I missed something? I certainly don't recall reading anything about it.

thevulture *Elite 4* has popped up more times than… well, a hoofing great big 'popping-up' thing. For a title that has supposedly been in development for years, has anything concrete ever been seen? Never mind smoke and mirrors; I'd love to see just one concept shot, let alone a real McCoy screenshot.

Smurph If *Duke Nukem Forever* can actually find release then there's hope for this…

TimothyLumsden *Elite* strikes me as a game that was pretty much perfect in its retro original form, bar the hardness of docking. Not sure I really want anything more from it, besides a docking computer.

REMAKES WE WANT

silkyman What are the thoughts on these? I think *Syndicate* would be brilliant as a first-person game. It would lend itself to multiplayer too.

PubZombie *Mail Order Monsters*, please.

pratty The thing with complete remakes is that they tend to remake only the good games. Sometimes it's worthwhile and sometimes it isn't. *GoldenEye* for the Wii is pretty decent but it wasn't really necessary; a touched-up port of the original would have done the job.

eeztheman I'd love to see a proper remake of *Road Rash* on the current machines.

theantmeister EA should just remaster and re-release the entire Bullfrog back catalogue.

NRGuk *Desert Strike* would be awesome as a decent remake. Done properly, of course!

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which Kirby game is the best?

Kirby's Dream Land [Game Boy] — 44%

Kirby's Epic Yarn [Wii] — 56%

ChipTune Am I the only person who thought the new one was a load of boring f*cking sh*t?

Smurph It seems like the weirder *Kirby*'s games get, the better they become

HOT TOPIC

Best Mega Drive Road Rash?

Road Rash – 25%
Road Rash II – 75%
Road Rash 3 – 0%

"Gnarly split-screen bike fights for the win! Very few gaming moments equal whacking a mate over the head with a chain to take a victory" **– StickHead**

"The original by miles. It has the best tunes, an analogue speedometer and some cracking graphics and a story. So what if it's one-player? The others come nowhere near." **– Ralph Milne's Left Foot**

interview with a large number of Lynx developers as well. Expect to see both articles in the coming months.

BACK TO THE ISSUES

Dear Retro Gamer,

I'm from Australia and I recently picked up a copy of your **Videogames Hardware Handbook Vol 2**, which I have been very impressed with! I would dearly like to buy your back catalogue of magazines, but see that many of them are now unavailable and only your DVDs are currently available. While I do like the idea of these issues, I was wondering if you could clear up some questions for me about them?

Is the first volume of the **Hardware Handbook** included on either of these DVDs? If not, will it come back into print at a later date? Finally, do the four **Retro Gamer Collections** simply feature the best articles from previous issues, or do they also include brand new content?

Keep up the great work, guys.

Matthew Pace

Glad to hear that you've been enjoying our second Hardware Handbook. There are currently no plans to reprint the original edition, and it's also not part of either of our eMags. With regards to the contents of the DVDs, they are all taken from past issues of the magazine, so if your collection of magazines is complete you might not need them. Hope that clears things up for you, Matthew.

"I sent a recent issue to my brother, who is currently stationed in Afghanistan"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

New computers!
This month the buzz in the office has been firmly dominated by our swanky brand new computers. Before being allowed to lay a single digit on his, though, Darran had to spend an entire day tidying through around six terabytes of email dating back from his first ever day at work, as Steve, who has never received a single email in his life, sat back and smiled inanely. Darran then cunningly deflected the abuse over to Stuart, who wasn't given a new computer but instead some more memory for his creaky CPC.

MANA MANIA

Dear Retro Gamer,

Just wanted to say that I absolutely adored the *Secret Of Mana* issue. It's one of my favourite gaming franchises of all time, so I was delighted to see it receive a cover. I also enjoyed the included feature, but was rather disappointed that there were no interviews with any of the developers. Being able to speak to classic developers is one of the main reasons why I find **Retro Gamer** so entertaining, so when you have a high-profile title on the cover, it sticks out when you don't get any new, juicy anecdotes.

Having said that, the article itself was very well written, and even though I consider myself a big fan of the series there were many things that were certainly new to me.

David Portman

We're glad to hear that you enjoyed our feature on the *Mana* series, and yes, it really was a cracking cover that we were extremely happy with.

Interviews with Japanese developers are always hard to secure and they're made doubly difficult when the person in question leaves a company. Many of them feel duty bound to not discuss previous games they worked on, which also makes interviews rather tricky. Annoyingly, our interview actually turned up two days after the magazine went to press, but as the answers focused only on the iPhone port of the game we decided not to use them. Hope this clears things up.



>> Philippe will be pleased that features on *Rayman* and *Alone In The Dark* are in the pipeline.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN
Half-Life
This may shock some, but I've never finished *Half-Life*. I'd always get to the bit with the soldiers and never progress any further. Not any more, though. Almost at the end and it really is a wonderful piece of work.





STUART
World Of Goo
As the recent recipient of an iPad, I've been filling my evenings catching up with all the cheap portable gaming that had passed me by. My findings: *Angry Birds* is overrated and *World Of Goo* is brilliantly inventive.





ANDREW
Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4
I'm not a *Harry Potter* fan – never read the books or seen the films – but I thoroughly enjoyed this. The sense of humour that Traveller's Tales displays in the cut-scenes is what makes the games so much fun.



Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.retrogamer.net

Magazine team
Editor **Darran Jones**
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk
☎ 01202 586237
Editor in Chief **Rick Porter**
Senior Designer **Stephen Williams**
Features Editor **Stuart Hunt**
Senior Sub Editor **Mat Hoddy**
Sub Editor **Olly Dean**
Senior Art Editor **Greg Whitaker**
Head of Design **Ross Andrews**

Contributors
Mike Bevan, Richard Burton, Stuart Campbell, David Crookes, Paul Davies, Paul Drury, Andrew Fisher, Martin Goldberg, Craig Grannell, Joachim Hesse, Richard Hewison, Jason Kelk, Iain Lee, Samuel Roberts

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Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
Head of Sales Hang Deretz
☎ 01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Advertising Sales Executive Madeleine Jones
☎ 01202 586417
madeleine.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
International Manager Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
Subscriptions Manager Lucy Nash
subscriptions@imagine-publishing.co.uk
For all subscription enquiries
email retrogamer@servicehelpline.co.uk
☎ (UK) 0844 848 8412
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Circulation
Circulation & Export Manager Darren Pearce
☎ 01202 586200

Production
Production Director Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

Founders
Managing Director Damian Butt
Finance Director Steven Boyd
Creative Director Mark Kendrick

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Mickey Mouse

DISNEY'S MAIN MOUSE MEETS A GREMLIN

» RETROREVIVAL

» AMSTRAD CPC
» GREMLIN GRAPHICS
» 1988

Mickey Mouse is one of the most recognisable figures in the world. Loved by children all over the globe and the star of numerous cartoons, Disney's figurehead has appeared on everything from lunchboxes to records. He's also starred in a number of classic and not so classic videogames.

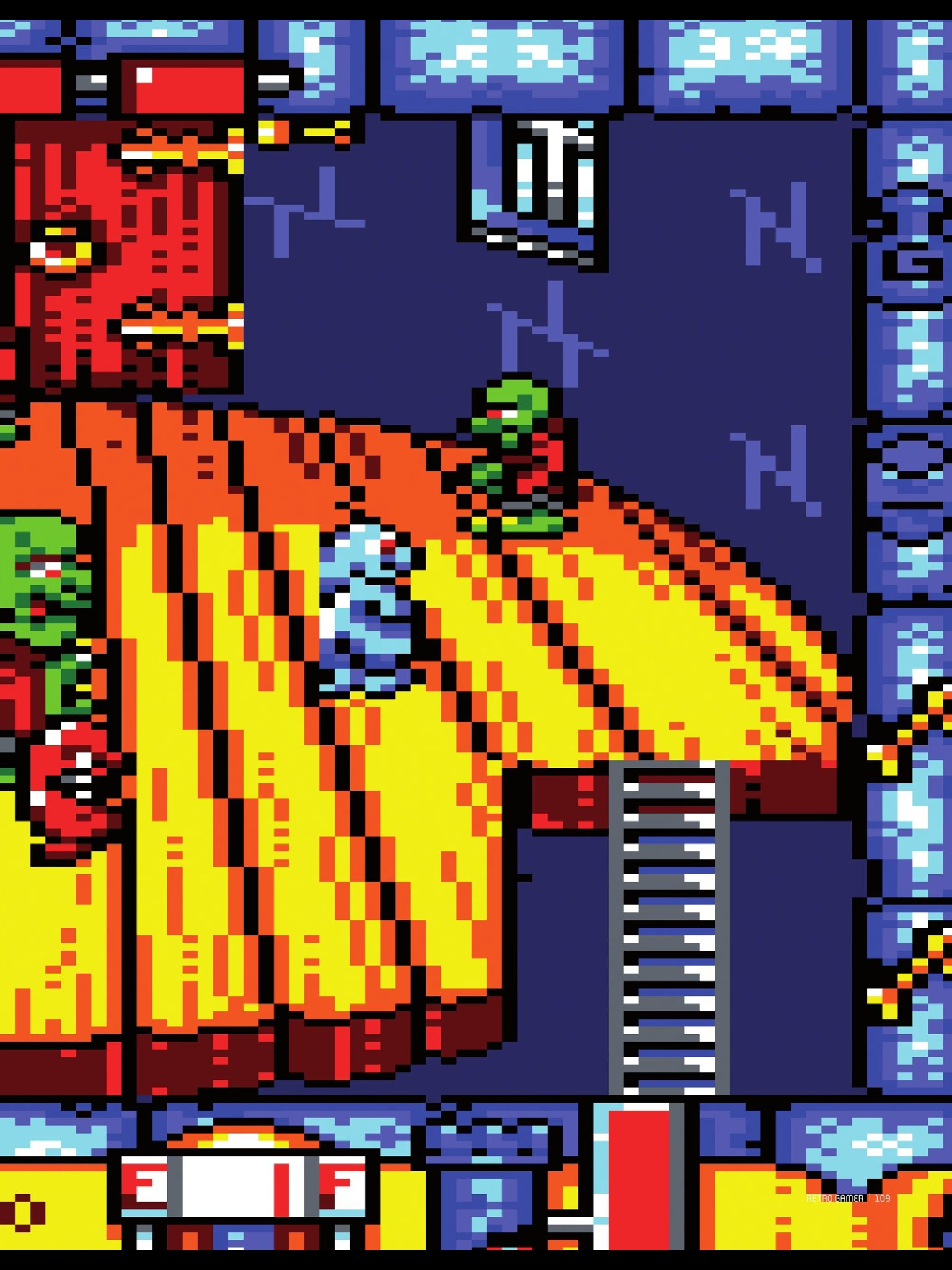
One of his earliest digital adventures was this surprisingly enjoyable effort from Gremlin Graphics.

After failing to be impressed with Mickey's latest adventure *Epic Mickey – Average Mickey* would have been more fitting – we've constantly found ourselves returning to this early 8-bit and 16-bit offering.

Taking control of Mickey, you must liberate five towers by slowly climbing up them and destroying any ghosts and ogres that you encounter along the way. What's rather clever though is that Mickey has two weapons – a hammer and a water pistol – which are only effective against ogres and ghosts respectively. Needless to say, there's much switching between weapons, as Mickey juggles items to ensure that he's never caught flat-footed by the tower's many beasties. Problems are further compounded by larger enemies splitting into two, which makes your task even harder to manage, particularly when you consider the size of some of the ledges that Mickey must battle upon.

Defeated enemies drop replacement water for Mickey's pistol, a number of different spells, a black bubble that stuns the poor mouse if he touches it, or a key. The key is rather handy, as it leads to one of several sub-games that are variations on everything from *Pac-Man* to *Donkey Kong* and *Space Invaders*.

Despite the fact that it's now a venerable 23 years old, *Mickey Mouse* still holds up surprisingly well, although it no longer justifies the 90 per cent-plus scores it received from some magazines back in the day. The controls admittedly feel a little clunky at times and the collision detection isn't the best, but there's still a lot of fun to be had as you tackle the huge tower and its many mini-games. Unsurprisingly, we think the Amstrad conversion was rather wonderful, but all the 8-bit versions had their merits. A charming platformer that remains a lot of fun to play. *



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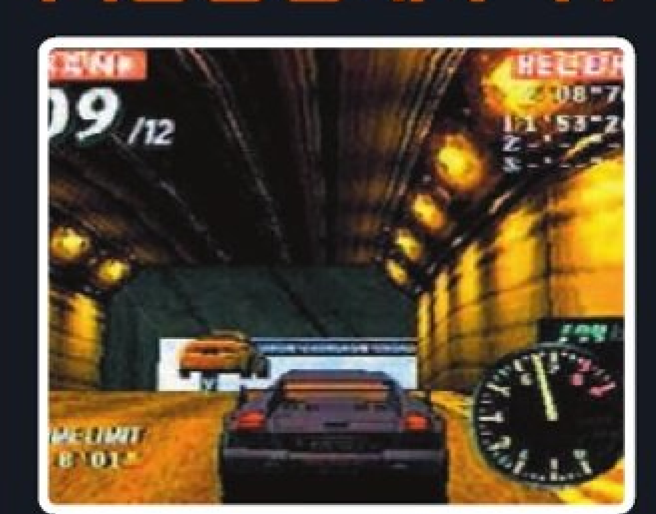
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■ Stephen Crow drops by to give the lowdown on his hit Spectrum game and reveals details on its canned sequel



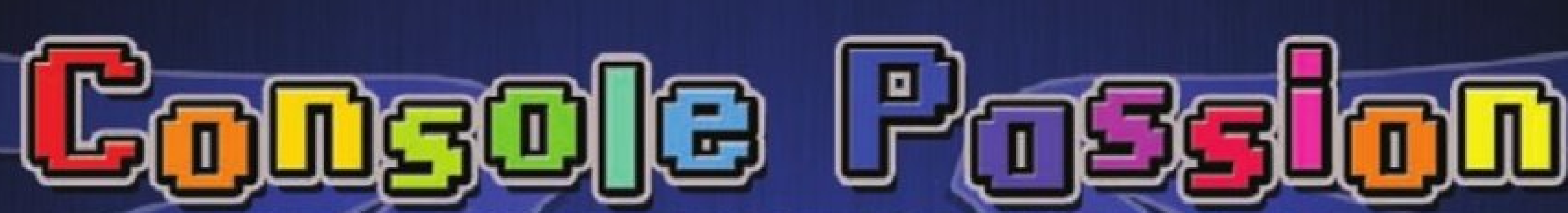
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LASER GHOST

» When a popular game is released, developers are never far away with aims to capitalise. And who can blame them? If a movie came out in 1989 about a sandwich saving the galaxy from clowns, and a few million people bought into it, someone would have based an arcade game on it. Probably Sega, in fact; remember this bizarre take on *Ghostbusters* it birthed?



01

» Poltergeists run amok, scaring the living. In the crossfire a young girl gets abducted and our heroes are called in. After re-killing everything, our intrepid ghost busters locate her. She's renting out a one-bedroom flat. And she's possessed.



02

» As none of the busters have exorcism schooling, they use military-grade lasers to burn the spectral squatter away. After a few blasts the girl transforms into something more unsettling: a mangirl. Likely a bad reaction to the laserbeams.



03

» After several days the swelling subsides and the girl starts to resemble something that you wouldn't expect to see fighting police outside a nightclub. Her first words after coming round are, 'Idiot in the yellow, you're hurting my left leg'. Probably.



04

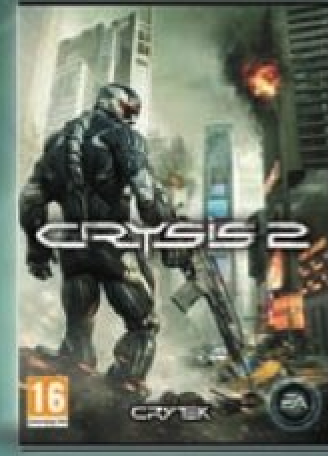
» Aping the end credits of *Ghostbusters*, the cops escort our heroes through the city as its denizens organise a street party to thank them. Can you spot the five people in this picture with moss for hair, and a cameo from The Man In The Iron Mask?



05

» In a final emotional scene, the girl is reunited with her mother. They could have looked a little more pleased; rather than joy, the two have faces of obvious anguish. We love the primary-coloured life preservers - *Teletubbies* meets Marty McFly.





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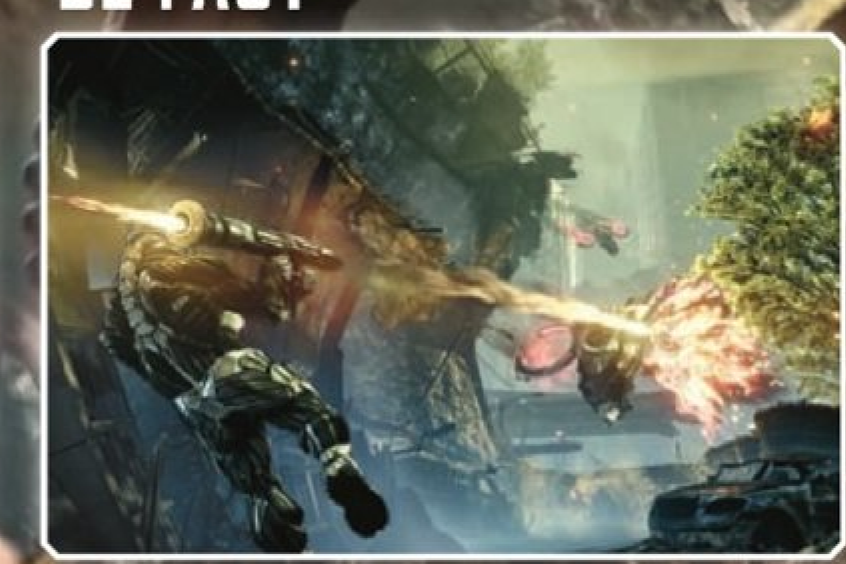
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